

Mt. Vernon Board of School Trustees Special Meeting

Mt. Vernon Board of School Trustees
Mt. Vernon Administrative Service Center
Friday, August 6, 2021
4:30pm - 5:30pm

Present: Mr. Greg Rollo, Director of Technology; Mrs. Maria Bond, Director of Community Relations; Mrs. Laura Durig, SpEd Director; Mrs. Kellie Freeman, Board President; Mr. Tony May, Board Member; Dr. Jack Parker, Superintendent; Mr. Derek Shelton, Director of Operations; Mr. Chris Smedley, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. Scott Shipley, Director of Curriculum; Mrs. Shannon Walls, Board Member; Mr. Greg Elkins, Chief Financial Officer; Lisa Heitman, Finance Dept; Chad Gray, School Board Member

Absent: Mrs. Gwen Scrogam, Board Secretary; Phil Edwards, School Board Member; Susan McElroy

1 Pledge of Allegiance (4:30 PM)

Mrs. Kellie Freeman, Board President

Minutes:

Mrs. Freeman led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2 Call to Order

Mrs. Kellie Freeman, Board President

Minutes:

The meeting was called to order at 4:31 p.m.

3 Adoption of Agenda

Mrs. Kellie Freeman, Board President

Minutes:

Mrs. Walls made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented, Mr. Gray seconded, and the motion carried 4-0.

4 Reports

Dr. Jack Parker, Superintendent

Minutes:

Dr. Parker called on Mr. Smedley to give an update to the Health and Safety Plan.

4.1 Recommended Updates to Health and Safety Plan

Mr. Chris Smedley, Assistant Superintendent

Minutes:

Mr. Smedley stated the purpose of the meeting was to share some recommended updates made to the district's Health and Safety Plan, which the board had approved at the July board meeting; however, due to a recent substantial increase in the number of positive Covid cases across the state, as well as

in the community with the new Delta variant; it was felt important to revise the plan in order to provide more explicit information specifically related to Covid. Mr. Smedley reviewed last year's data points related to Covid-19, as well as the current status of Covid cases. He presented data from the Indiana Department of Health in Hancock County on the immunization statistics of our residents. Mr. Smedley shared legal guidance the district received stating an obligation to report positive cases to the Health Department and to conduct contact tracing with quarantine as needed. He went over the guiding principles in developing and revising the health and safety protocols. The tiered plan is to include language now that particularly focuses on positive cases within a building per tier. These revisions were made on recommendations per the Indiana Department of Health, as well as the CDC. Mr. Smedley also presented the goals to help keep students in school and stated we will continue to rely on the guiding principles to help navigate this issue to ensure the health and safety of our students.

5 Public Comment

Mrs. Kellie Freeman, Board President

B 225 Public Participation at Board Meetings

May only address items listed in the agenda

Must be recognized by presiding officer

Must provide name, address and group affiliation, if and when appropriate

Limited to 3 minutes duration

All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no person may address or question Board members individually

Minutes:

Dr. Dan Stock stated that people do things that are not useful, as well as getting their guidance and information from the Indiana Department of Health and the CDC, who do not bother to read science. Dr. Stock stated he is a functional family medicine physician who is specially trained in immunology and inflammation regulation. He claimed everything being recommended by the CDC and the IDOH are contrary to all the rules of science. Dr. Stock gave information on respiratory viruses and the fact that these particles can go through any mask worn by an individual. A flash drive was provided containing three studies sponsored by the NIH quoting that exact fact, even though that ignores the very science they paid to have done. He stated we cannot make this virus go away and the history of all respiratory viruses is that they circulate all year long waiting for the immune system to get sick through the winter and then cause symptomatic disease. He stated vaccination changes none of this and nothing can be done for this as much the same as the common cold, influenza, or a respiratory virus. He presented there is no reason to do anything different for any individual vaccinated or unvaccinated and that no vaccine ever stops infection.

Haile Loring is a parent of three children. She is concerned about her children being forced out of school without adequate academic help. She stated according to the CDC and the IDOH there have been zero deaths reported in children from 0 to 17. She felt it was her job to be a voice for the children for them to be given the educational opportunities they deserve and the corporation's job is to provide those resources because the tax payers are paying the corporation to do just that. She was concerned about the long term social and emotional consequences masking and quarantining is going to cause.

Amanda Steele is a parent and healthcare worker. She voiced the virus has turned into something political. She was concerned about masks affecting the children's breathing and the side effects associated with wearing a mask. She felt the rate is so low for children to even contract the virus. She had no faith that the testing being done is even accurate. She stated that in clinical trials, follow up testing and labs are done; however, this will not be the same with the vaccine and no one knows the long term outcome.

Janet Smith is a citizen of our community. She stated the CDC does not make laws and that they only provide guidance; however, they are not consistent. She felt since there is no mask mandate; the parents should be able to choose if their children wear masks or not. She felt the the School Board should listen to those parents who are involved and who elected them, as opposed to CDC guidance that is ever changing.

Traci Dayhoff is a parent of four students. She voiced concerned about the current virtual learning plan, as well as antibody testing. She stated students are counted absent and teachers can post assignments if they wish, but they don't have to. The students are not receiving any instruction, but might get some busy work. Some of the teachers she stated did not even respond. She stated one of her children was quarantined three times last year and out over 30 days, but never had so much as a cold, but at least last year, virtual learning was an option. She felt keeping her student home for ten days is considered neglect; however, the school corporation can send the student home for as much with no learning and that is fine. She felt if a student is contact traced, there should be the option of testing for antibodies and if they do, that is one less student who needs to be quarantined.

Brooke Jones is a parent of three students. She has served on the MES PTO and helped with the MVEF Gala. She appreciates the feeling of family associated with being a part of Mt. Vernon. She feels right now the parents are the ones who need to be heard. She wants to advocate for a no mask policy. She claimed there are 287 schools in Indiana who do not contact trace and they are still open. She also read emails from the executive assistant to the secretary of education at the Indiana Health Department and from John Jessup, the Hancock County Commissioner. She felt the corporation should be brave and stand against the policies we have been advised to put in place.

Kelli Leonard is a parent. She wanted to talk on points brought up at the July board meeting concerning the vaccination rate for Hancock County and the difference in statistics with the CDC. She questioned the PCR testing that had been done at the end of the previous school year. She felt that the corporation should not be listening to the CDC, as they are all over the place, and that they should be listening instead to the parents. She questioned how far back contact tracing would be done and concerns with her student being able to participate in athletics.

Cindy Cobb is a parent. She voiced concerns about her child who was contact traced and being at home with no instruction. She felt he was being discriminated against. She has always been a strong supporter of Mt. Vernon. She stated her child sat in quarantine at school for two hours and was not contacted by the school, but by her child. She claimed the procedures are not working this year. She said she entered the school with no one questioning her and no one asking her for identification. She had not heard from some of her child's teachers on schoolwork. She was concerned about student's mental health with being in quarantine. She hoped that the events that occurred at the school with her student will cause a change in how the corporation handles things moving forward.

Phillip Coleman is a parent. He did not want to speak against masks or contact tracing, but was concerned about the amount of money we spend on technology and children are being sent home with no resources. He felt most students will not be able to catch up after their quarantine period. He also brought up that last year not a single child contracted Covid after being contact traced. He felt kids are being left behind by being forced home without resources. He agreed that teachers are overworked and do a great job; however, it is their responsibility to put in the extra work to provide the necessary resources.

6 Action Item

Dr. Jack Parker, Superintendent

6.1 Update to Health and Safety Plan

Dr. Jack Parker, Superintendent

Minutes:

Dr. Parker brought up board discussion and consideration of the recommendations. He stated that the corporation is trying to keep the students in school as much as possible. He stated that a third of the parents who have been contacting the school are asking the corporation to be more restrictive. He voiced that as we were entering into the school year, the hope was to contact trace for reporting purposes, but not quarantine; however, the week before school started, the legal landscape changed. We received legal advice that this is a Class B misdemeanor and that each day of noncompliance of not reporting and excluding students from school constituted a separate offense. We do have to go off of legal guidance. It is our hope to return to as much of a normal educational environment for our students as possible. He shared the breakdown last year with highs and lows of each building for positive Covid cases. The hope is to prevent having to close a building. He believes that unless our numbers of positive Covid cases increase considerably from last year or if they are all concentrated in a few short weeks, we are not likely to get to the orange tier and do not expect to have to move into wearing masks again. He stated the tier response does meet the needs in the event that this grows significantly and that we are doing everything we can to guard that. Saying that, we have received clear advice that reporting positive cases and conducting contact tracing investigations are both required by law. He stated we have some things to do better, specifically regarding supporting students who are not able to come to school and we have already started having some significant conversations. The hope is to have a small number of students that cannot be at school for whatever reason as we value in-person learning and the human interaction that provides for all students and staff.

Mr. May made a motion to approve the updates to the Health and Safety Plan as presented. Mr. Gray seconded.

Mrs. Freeman asked if we can continue to look at ways to not quarantine. Dr. Parker reiterated that the only true change we are recommending are the trigger points if we have relatively larger number of positive Covid cases in our schools. The other part is that we have provided a great deal of clarity on a lot of the other issues. He agreed that we can go back and continue to look at this. He stated the CDC was changing their recommendations on social distancing and this would hopefully alleviate some of the contact tracing. He stated we listen to the CDC, but our guidance is provided through the state and local health departments.

Mrs. Walls made a motion to table this discussion until the August 16th board meeting, Mr. May seconded, and the motion carried 4-0

7 Adjournment

Mrs. Kellie Freeman, Board President

Minutes:

Mrs. Walls made a motion to adjourn at 5:48 p.m., Mr. May seconded, and the motion carried 4-0.