

Board of Education

Ellington, Connecticut

April 7, 2021

A special virtual meeting of the Ellington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, April 7, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. in the Ellington High School Cafeteria.

Present were: Mr. Blanchette; Ms. Dzen, Picard-Wambolt, Nord, Kupferschmid, Underwood, Mullin, and Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools.

Administration present were: Mr. John Collins, Director of Technology; Mr. Brian Hendrickson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Mr. Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations; Dr. Kristy LaPorte, Director of Special Services; Dr. Sue Nash-Ditzel, Principal, Crystal Lake School; Ms. Sara Spak, Special Services Supervisor, Ms. Jennifer Hill, Principal, Windermere School; Mr. John Guidry, Principal, Ellington High School; Ms. Melissa Haberern, Special Services Supervisor; Mr. Michael Nash, Co-Principal, Ellington Middle School; Mr. Michael Verderame; Principal, Center School; Mr. Brandon HuBrins, Assistant Principal, Ellington High School; and Ms. Michele Murray, Co-Principal, Ellington Middle School.

Also in attendance: Ms. Jennifer Brown, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Human Resources Coordinator; Ms. Kim Sztaba, Teacher, EMS; Ms. Katie Herrity, Teacher, Center School; Ms. Diane Frasca, Special Education Aide, Windermere School; Ms. Lori Purcaro, Teacher, Crystal Lake School; Ms. Martha Allegue, EHS PTO Leadership; Ms. Erika Cantin, Windermere PTO Leadership; and Ms. Sarah Rogers, EMS PTO Leadership; Ms. Julie Burns-McAvoy, Crystal Lake School PTO Leadership.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Ms. Dzen, Chairman.

AGENDA

BOE Workshop: 2021-2022 School Opening

This workshop was a precursor for possible Board action at the Board of Education meeting to be held on Wednesday, April 21, 2021.

Three separate groups of Board members, staff and parents participated in activities -- facilitated by Mr. Greenleaf, Mr. Hendrickson, and Dr. LaPorte -- focused on reflection from this school year and discussed whether or not to offer a remote learning option for the 2021 - 2022 school year.

The overwhelming consensus of the entire group was for the Ellington Public Schools not to offer a remote learning option for the 2021 - 2022 school year.

SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP

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SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP

Part I - Group discussion activity

As a group, reflect on the the successes, challenges, and major obstacles for the 2020-21 school year learning modules (Hybrid, Full Remote, Full In-Person, Remote Option [Silver])

Brief Summary of Discussion:

- The groups discussed the success of being in-person in allowing families and staff to hold onto some normalcy in what was otherwise a challenging year
- There was discussion around the difficulties of teachers, especially 7-12, in running a virtual and in-person classroom at the same time. Administrators and teachers felt this was a detriment to both in-Person and remote students.
- Elementary remote was more successful in-terms of dedicated teachers, but it put a capacity constraint as staff needed to be pulled from other assignments (e.g. intervention, library/media). This particularly, but not exclusively, affected Windermere due to the percentages of remote students at each school.

- Strong focus and reflection by parents and staff that the in-person learning is in the best interest of all students, both academically and socially-emotionally (with exception of documented medical conditions)
- Staff shared concerns with disengaged Silver students whose families were/are aware of the lack of engagement and chose/are choosing to stay in Silver option despite the engagement benefits of being in-person. Staff discussed how several students who had engagement issues in Silver are now performing much better in person.

Part II - Position Statement Activity

Given the unknowns - what is our message to the community for Ellington Public Schools' approach to the 2021-22 school year. As a group discuss the options presented, and select a statement that best captures the message you would like to see. Modify statements as needed.

Here are the two statements that were discussed.

Statement One - Remote learning option

Ellington Public Schools (EPS) will build off of the successes from the 20-21 school year and offer families the opportunity to choose between in-person and full remote learning. The remote learning option is complex and requires a different approach at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

EPS will continue with a similar remote learning model with dedicated teachers K-6 and with teachers 7-12 instructing to both students in-person and remote simultaneously. This commitment will re-initiate weekly early release Wednesdays as teachers continue to adjust to a new paradigm of delivering instruction.

Statement Two - No remote learning option

The Ellington Public Schools recognize that in-person learning has the greatest potential to help and guide students to reach their full academic and social potential. In order to ensure the best learning opportunity for all students, EPS will not offer a full remote learning program for students, unless required by the State of Connecticut.

At the same time EPS recognizes that the world of education has changed over the last year. Advances in our organization and staff's capacity to provide an

education deeply integrated with technology will need to continue moving forward. This includes the ability to provide deeper and more engaging experience with the curriculum across content areas, as well as educational opportunities to students affected by quarantine and isolation due to COVID-19.

Brief Summary of Discussion:

- It was almost unanimous that discussion participants favored *Statement Two* without a remote learning option.
- Participants noted that declaring a position sooner rather than later could be advantageous as it allows families to plan ahead of time.
- There was some discussion around addressing the needs of students with a medical condition that would preclude them from an in-person learning environment. It was discussed that established processes such 504 could be used to deal with individual circumstances in the following year.
- Discussion on the need to define give understanding to both physical and psychological safety needs of students, staff, and families
- The group also was very thankful and appreciate of all EPS staff across all positions in and outside of the classroom

The meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Picard-Wambolt
Secretary