

**JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
Union #61 & Tantasqua Regional School Committees

Meeting of Thursday, August 6, 2020  
Auditorium – Tantasqua Senior High School

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Brimfield**

Jennifer Custance  
Eric Jaeger  
Kimberly Hirsch  
Michele-Lee Shea

**Sturbridge**

Katherine Alexander  
Mary Bellezza  
Karen Kowal  
Kristen Tuohey

**Tantasqua**

Laura Alden  
Patricia Barnicle  
Mary Bellezza  
Jennifer Custance  
Michelle Fitzgerald  
Pamela Fitzgerald  
Elias Gillen  
Ted Goodwin  
Erik Iller  
Kristen Leo  
Mary Lovett  
Sheila Noyes-Miller  
Christine Randall  
Michael Valanzola  
Susan Waters

**Brookfield**

Andrew Dunn  
Jeffrey Morin

**Wales**

Carolyn Boehne  
Ed Boyce  
Ashley Gallant  
Christine Randall

**Holland**

Laura Alden  
Elias Gillen  
Erik Iller  
Sarah Naples

**MEMBERS NOT PRESENT**

Brimfield: Angela Bradway  
Brookfield: Megan Cunningham  
Holland: Cheryl Raymond  
Sturbridge: Megan Panek  
Wales: Amy Bishop  
Tantasqua: Megan Cunningham, William Haggerty

**ALSO PRESENT**

Erin Nosek, Superintendent; Deborah Boyd, Associate Superintendent of Business/Finance; Jodi Bourassa, Assistant Superintendent; Administrative Leadership team (includes all district building principals, Vocational Director, SPED Director, Technology Director) and audience.

Mr. Valanzola convened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. leading all present in the Pledge of Allegiance. With the absence of Mrs. Cunningham, Mr. Valanzola indicated that Mrs. Alexander would serve as the Interim Chair for the Union 61 membership.

Mr. Valanzola explained to all present that this meeting was specifically called to:

(1) approve/adjust the district's calendar to allow for the 10 days of Covid19 protocols training for the staff and move the first day of school for students to return to school in alignment with the Governor's and Education Commissioner's recommendation; and

(2) discuss and approve the recommendation for the reopening plans for Tantasqua and the Union 61 District schools.

Mr. Valanzola indicated that the Public Access portion of the meeting would be opened after the Superintendent's presentation of the recommendation to reopen schools. Each community member shall identify themselves and their town and will be allowed two minutes to ask questions and/or make a statement. Once Public Access is closed and a motion and second is made to accept a reopening plan, only School Committee members will be allowed to speak through the Chair with the same two-minute limitation and a rebuttal opportunity.

Mr. Valanzola indicated that there are expectations that the School Committees may need to meet again to discuss reopening plans and that tonight's decision is based on the current situation.

Any changes with Covid19 infection rates may require adjustments to the plans being discussed tonight. Mr. Valanzola thanked all administrators for their hard work, with a special thank you for Dr. Nosek's leadership on this matter.

## 1. CALENDAR – MODIFICATION

Dr. Nosek indicated the Commissioner of Education has issued a recommendation that schools provide 10 days for planning and training staff on Covid19 protocols. The Commissioner has adjusted the required time and learning mandate for students from 180 days to 170 days. This change would have teachers returning on August 31<sup>st</sup>, but students returning ten school days later, on Wednesday, September 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **Motion:**

Tantasqua Motion #FY21-07

Union 61 Motion #FY21-01

Mrs. Barnicle moved, seconded by Dr. Waters, to adjust the school calendar as described, with staff returning on August 31, 2020 and students returning on September 16, 2020.

VOTE: Tantasqua: In Favor (13)

Union 61: In Favor (14)

There were no objections, motion carries.

## 2. REOPENING PLANS FOR TANTASQUA & UNION 61 SCHOOLS

Mr. Valanzola asked Dr. Nosek to discuss the reopening of the District's schools.

Dr. Nosek first thanked all teachers and support staff for the tremendous job they did maintaining student education when schools were closed in March due to the Covid19 crisis. She indicated that the Commissioner of Education believes that children need to come back to school and as such has required school districts to submit their reopening plans to DESE within the next few days. Dr. Nosek indicated that the staff has reviewed every physical space in all facilities to determine the social distancing spacing, considered transportation, food services and health/PPE options. Additionally, she has received feedback from parents, teachers and staff in consideration of the various reopening options. The complexity of the district added further considerations.

Dr. Nosek outlined each of the reopening learning models: In Person Learning, Hybrid Learning and Remote Learning. Dr. Nosek indicated the recommendation is the **Hybrid Model** for initial reopening.

Although the World Health Organization made a recommendation of 3 ft. of distance between students, the feedback throughout district was that further distancing of 6 ft. was preferred. Data related to classroom spacing with current student enrollment to determine classroom capacity with 6 ft. of distancing was reviewed and included in the report.

Under the Hybrid model proposed, students are to be divided in half (Cohorts A & B), and will attend in-person using a week-on, week-off model. Cohort C includes students on IEP's or with other specialized needs to be offered in-person schooling for both weeks. Cohort D are students/families who specifically select remote learning experience. The "D" group will receive all instruction using an in-house remote learning platform or the DESE offered platform. Once families decide which model they want, they will be asked to stick with their choice at least through the first semester. If an extreme number of families chose the "D" option, then administration may adjust to bring more students in for in-person learning.

Dr. Nosek acknowledged that these are difficult decisions and recognized the hardships that have been placed on parents. She reminded everyone that a lot could happen between now and the beginning of school on September 16<sup>th</sup> and adjustments to the plan may be deemed necessary.

Mr. Valanzola opened the Public Access of the meeting. The following serves as a synopsis of the issues brought forth:

- *Will masks be required?* A: Yes, masks will be required during bus transportation and the school day unless there is a medical reason to use an alternative.
- *Will teachers be remote or in-class?* A: Teachers will be in-class and the Principals will work on schedules for remote learning. Web cameras may be used as an option.

- *Why is every district school going to follow the same model?* A: Transportation is one of the issues, but as time progresses, administration will continue to review the data to see if adjustments should and could be made.
- *How will families manage the Cohort options for more than one child?* A: Administration is planning on keeping family members on the same schedule. It is the intent to keep everyone in a household in the same Cohort, unless there are IEP's or special needs.
- *What is in place to help parents and students with remote learning?* A: There will be training sessions to help parents cope with the various learning platforms. Students participating in remote learning will also be trained in remote technology.
- *If teachers are in the classroom, how will they present to the remote students?* A: Teaching models will vary by school. Teacher teams will provide continuity for students.
- *How can school staff members with children be expected to work and help their children?* A: Administration will do our best to work with staff members, recognizing that it is difficult, but the hybrid decision was based on the best interest for children.
- *Who will supply the masks?* A: It is expected that parents are to supply masks for their children, but the school and buses will have masks available when needed and additional available for students and staff.
- *How will cleanliness be maintained in the schools?* A: Custodial staff schedules will be adjusted to ensure that all high-touch surfaces are sanitized throughout the day. Cleanliness checklists will be prepared to maintain sanitary conditions. Disinfecting will be done throughout the day and at least full disinfecting done once a week. It may be found that more thorough cleanings are needed on the weekends. There is funding available to help with cleaning.
- *Will the staff be screened for Covid?* A: Parents are asked to monitor their children's health and staff will be asked to stay home if they have any symptoms. The health issue and protocols will be part of the 10-day teacher training.
- *What will happen if anyone (staff or student) is exposed to Covid?* A: Follow the CDC guidelines and anyone exposed will be required to self-quarantine. Any quarantined students in Cohorts A, B & C can participate in remote learning during absences.
- *If you are encouraging staff to stay home if feeling sick, will they be paid?* A: Yes, under the current regulations related to Covid.
- *Are remote students monitored for attendance?* A: Yes, attendance will be monitored and students are expected to follow a traditional school day. The time and learning structure for remote learning was included as Appendix C on the report.
- *Will remote learners be required to take the MCAS?* A: Yes
- *How will remote services be provided to children with special needs?* A: The school is obligated to continue working with students remotely.
- *What distance are the schools enforcing?* A: 6'
- *What is the decision on fall sports?* A: There has been no decision issued from the Commissioner of Education or MIAA.
- *What will happen to the extended day programs?* A: Still under review and consideration.
- *How will grading be done at the JH & HS?* A: Letter grading (NOT Pass/Fail)
- *Can families change their mind to move their children from one model to another?* A: Yes, but families are asked to stick with their decision for the first full marking period.
- *How can parents learn more?* A: There are virtual meetings scheduled for each of the five elementary schools, JH, SH and Voc. Tech Division. Meeting times posted on the schools' websites.
- *Parents spoke of the difficulty for those adults who need to return to work but might want remote learning for their children.*

Dr. Nosek acknowledged that this will put an additional burden on families, but the decision was made in the interest of children. She added the goal is to get all children back to school full time,

but many decisions going forward will depend on the Covid19 infection rate data. She noted that every precaution will be taken, including training students to wash hands and/or use the hand sanitizers that will be located throughout the facilities throughout the day, using outdoor spaces for learning whenever possible, keeping windows open when weather permits, requiring masks at all times, 6 ft. distancing in all areas, added cleaning and disinfecting protocols, training staff and other safety measures listed in the reopening school report.

**Motion:**

Tantasqua Motion #FY21-08  
Union #61 Motion #FY21-02

Mr. Goodwin moved, seconded by Mrs. Barnicle, to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to adopt the Hybrid Learning Model for reopening the Tantasqua and Union 61 District Schools.

**DISCUSSION:**

Mr. Valanzola reminded the audience that discussion is now limited to Committee members. He added that the vote is to accept a concept/framework for reopening the District's schools, with the logistics still to be worked out as appropriate for each town and facility. If information/data changes, then the Committee and administration can make adjustments. The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is requiring in the next few days every school submit their decision choosing one of the reopening options. The Superintendent, in consultation with the administrative team and Reopening Planning Committees consisting of principals, school committee members, teachers, nurses, parents, and local Boards of Health, combined with the current health data, lead to the decision to recommend the Hybrid Model.

Committee Member comments and/or questions (synopsis)

- *After School Performing Arts?* At this time, no after school performing arts.
- *Busing?* Masks will be required, extra masks on buses if needed. Plan to review bus routes to keep numbers at adequate distancing requirements. Many parents may choose to provide transportation, decreasing the numbers on buses.
- *Why week on/off, rather than days?* Transportation and continuity of instruction for five consecutive days was preferred for student learning.
- *Will there be adequate distancing for Cohort A & B students.* Every space has been measured using 6' distancing to determine capacity and the Hybrid model aligns with the metrics.
- *Do we have adequate number of teachers?* The schools are recruiting existing and new substitutes and the state is considering issuing emergency teaching licenses.
- Dr. Nosek indicated the members of the school community are doing everything possible to make this reopening work and her team will constantly monitor this crisis. She noted that how to best offer remote learning and how to move forward educating children has been the primary focus of all administrators since March when schools were forced closed.

VOTE - Tantasqua: In Favor (14); Opposed (0); Abstained (0)  
- Union #61: In Favor (11); Opposed (3); Abstained (0)

**ADJOURN**

**Motion:**

Tantasqua Motion #FY21-09  
Union #61 Motion #FY21-03

Dr. Waters moved, seconded by Mrs. Barnicle, to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 pm.

VOTE – Tantasqua: All in Favor  
Union #61: All in Favor