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PEMBROKE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, January 4, 2022
Virtual Meeting
7:30PM

PLEASE NOTE TIME & LOCATION

The meeting is recorded

Call to Order

Mr. Tropeano called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

Present from Administration: Erin Obey, Superintendent; Marybeth Brust, Assistant Superintendent; Jessica DeLorenzo, Director of Student Services

Present from Committee: Michael Tropeano, Chair; David Boyle, Vice Chair Susan Bollinger, Secretary; Lance Kennedy and Susie Scholl

Acknowledge & Schedule Visitors

Mr. Tropeano welcomed the audience members.

Adjustments to Agenda

Consideration of modification to facilities usage fees.

Communications

None

Approval of Bill Schedule

Warrants were sent out electronically for approval.

Mr. Tropeano said he wants to acknowledge the work of Mrs. Obey and Mrs. Brust over the past couple of weeks to get the district back to school as smoothly as possible after winter break. Mr. Tropeano said there was significant misinformation going around over past 24 hours and suggested people reach out to building administration with any questions as they have the most current information.

Superintendent's Report

Update on New CDC Isolation/Quarantining Guidance

Mrs. Obey said DESE supplied KN95 masks for staff to pick up 12k for Pembroke and at each building. They are to be used once or can be used twice if used with a second mask. The district received word on Wednesday that test kits would be available on Friday to districts to pick up in Quincy and the location changed to Franklin. PPS received only 270 test but has almost 400 staff members. Dese said to prioritize student facing staff and/or to open the double kits to provide individual tests but since there is only one set of directions in box the kits were not split. Mrs. Obey added that it is important to notify the school nurse and BOH if a home test is positive. The dashboard is accurate at this point due to the tremendous work of the school nurses. There are 92 active student cases as of right now which is 3.6% of population. There are very few new cases in past two days and all current cases will be off the dashboard by Monday 1/10. There are 17 staff cases which is 4.56% and about five staff are out for family covid and about 10 staff out for other reasons. Class coverage is being provided by the Curriculum Supervisors and principals and assistant principals where needed. 74.26% of PHS is currently vaccinated. Families can fill out an attestation form regarding

vaccination status. PCMS is 66.43% vaccinated and the percentages are low at the elementary level. Student attendance on any given Monday generally is 12% absent and yesterday it was 16.1% and today it is about 12%. There are no clusters of absences.

Mrs. Obey said the updated CDC guidance included the quarantine time being reduced from 10 days to 5 days and following the 5 days of isolation, the person should wear a mask for 5 days. Mr. Boyle asked about the status of bus transportation and Mrs. Obey said there is a national shortage of bus drivers due to Covid, but all routes are covered by a sub driver or routes are combined. Mrs. Scholl asked about not receiving enough tests for all staff and Mrs. Obey said PPS should get additional tests, but she doesn't know the timeline. She added that the school nurses have left over tests as of today if any staff needs them. Mrs. Bollinger asked if staff are utilizing K95 masks and Mrs. Obey said some staff picked them up and she has seen an increase in staff wearing them. Mr. Tropeano asked Mrs. Obey to clarify the type of masks received and Mrs. Obey said the K95 masks have been tested and are 85% effective. She said there is concern around expired tests being distributed and the ones DESE provided are not that type.

Mrs. Obey reminded everyone that students at home due to Covid receive asynchronous learning with check ins at elementary level and secondary level teachers post when available or student can email their teachers. She said there are not large numbers of students in a particular grade out, so no clusters have been identified.

Chat box questions:

Meg Libby-Mueller: Do staff cases include custodial staff, or is that contracted out?

Mrs. Obey said staff cases include all staff members of PPS but not bus drivers.

Melissa Hooley: If you are counting at home positive tests how are you verifying them? It is very well known that at home tests are not accurate and this has been verified by our health agent Lisa. So are the at home test positive cases required to retest before you are counting them into our numbers or considering other students as close contacts? Mrs. Obey said it is always recommended to follow up with a PCR test, but it is said that if a person is symptomatic and positive with at home test there is no need for a PCR test. Contact the school nurses to talk about individual family situations.

Brendan Finley: Can you clarify that statement around test to stay - Vaccinated students and/or teachers do not qualify for this due to shortage of tests?

Mrs. Obey said for an unvaccinated student/staff identified as a close contact in classroom or school sponsored activity they have the opportunity to participate in test and stay, which is now for 5 school days. Test and stay does not apply to vaccinated students/staff per DESE. She added the teacher vaccination percentage is greater than 80% based on the self-report.

Jenn Whitt: Wondering if you could specify what numbers of cases would prompt this additional support? The 45 active cases at the high school seems like a good opportunity to utilize that plan

Mrs. Obey said the 45 cases are spread out over four grades so it would not trigger a change in the learning plan.

Mr. Tropeano said due to HIPPA regulations PPS can't ask/know about the bus drivers. Mrs. Obey reminded that there are no close contacts on buses because everyone is masked, and the windows are open/cracked. There are also Covid protocols in the bus contracts.

Ray Levy: In their report cards students were sent home a notice if they had an excessive number of absences which was likely a result of quarantining due to having COVID or being a close contact. Is there a number of absences that would trigger any of other action, or was this just to notify parents in case this number seemed like more absences than they were aware?

Mrs. Obey said absences continue to be excused and waived for credit but PPS is required to notify parents/caregivers of the number of absences.

Consideration of Approval: PPS School Committee Letter to DESE Commissioner Jeffrey Riley

Mr. Tropeano said Kingston asked for the metrics that DESE is using to determine the masking requirement in place until 1/15 and asked for local control of masking requirements. The PPS school committee had agreed to modify the Kingston letter to make it suitable for PPS and the draft version is being presented tonight. Mr. Tropeano went through all the red-lined modifications for the committee.

Mrs. Scholl said the second paragraph talks about the absence of a formal detailed and well communicated criteria for unmasking and she would want guidance from DESE on this when the district hits the number to get to unmasking but unvaccinated students and staff will still be masked so this can create a problem. She said people in district have expressed their concern for privacy and she hopes that the people at the state level are considering this aspect.

Mrs. Bollinger said she wants to explain her thoughts behind the creation of this paragraph. She said she probably worded it a bit stronger than need but it comes from frustration with the whole process. She feels people should be able to make the decision about getting or not getting vaccinated for their children without government overreach. Everyone can walk around in stores without masks, but children have to wear them in school but not in all schools through the country. Mrs. Obey said Middleborough did get a response to their letter and it was a reference back to the August 25th letter that was sent to all district, so no new guidance or information has been shared.

Mr. Kennedy said he agrees about the frustration and is concerned about the masking vs unmasking groups and the segmentation that could create. Whether a response is received or not it is up to the committee to speak on behalf of the community. He is concerned that this could be a strong paragraph that could upset folks and encouraged the committee to stay as high level as possible and still get the point across.

Mr. Boyle said he agrees with the frustration and sees the passion on all sides, but the committee needs answers from DESE. Hopefully this letter will get their attention, but he is not optimistic that the committee will receive a response.

Mr. Tropeano said all districts throughout the Commonwealth are being treated the same way although some are urban, some are rural. The intent of the letter is to get data and gain local control. He said he likes the passion of the paragraph, but his concern is discussing a vaccination mandate as that hasn't been mentioned and also talking about the lack of studies. Lastly, DESE has a medical staff so he thinks that should not be in the letter and may be a bit outside of the original scope and changes the focus of where the letter was heading.

Mrs. Scholl said the paragraph may have more detail than needed at this time. Mrs. Bollinger said she hopes they do answer the letter and give some data points and some studies that they've used to determine these numbers. She understands it is a strongly worded paragraph that people may not agree with all the points. The committee agreed to removing the paragraph and agreed to the rest of the letter.

VOTE: On a motion made by David Boyle and seconded by Lance Kennedy it was unanimously voted, by roll call vote, to send the letter to DESE as amended.

Voting Yes: Michael Tropeano, David Boyle, Susie Scholl, Lance Kennedy and Susan Bollinger

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

Future Meeting Dates and Topics

1/25

1/10 – School safety session

VOTE: At 8:50pm, on a motion made by Susie Scholl and seconded by Susan Bollinger, it was unanimously voted, by roll call vote, to adjourn.

Voting Yes: Michael Tropeano, David Boyle, Susie Scholl, Lance Kennedy and Susan Bollinger

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

APPROVED: January 25, 2022

MOTIONS

VOTE: On a motion made by David Boyle and seconded by Lance Kennedy it was unanimously voted, by roll call vote, to send the letter to DESE as amended.

Voting Yes: Michael Tropeano, David Boyle, Susie Scholl, Lance Kennedy and Susan Bollinger

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none

VOTE: At 8:50pm On a motion made by Susie Scholl and seconded by Susan Bollinger, it was unanimously voted, by roll call vote, to adjourn.

Voting Yes: Michael Tropeano, David Boyle, Susie Scholl, Lance Kennedy and Susan Bollinger

Voting No: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: none