

Board of Education Regular Meeting

August 9, 2021 7:00 PM

Virtual

1. Call to Order

Sean Nugent; Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:01PM. Other Members present: Dan Harris, Charles Raymond, Cindy Luty, and Deborah Burke-Grabarek. Tom Turner and George Carver were excused. Also present: Dr. Roy Seitsinger; Superintendent, and Gloria Homiski; Recording Secretary.

Dr. Nugent explained that the sound system ordered for BOE meetings has been backordered. Therefore meetings will remain virtual until the system arrives and is installed.

Central Office continues to transition from CABE Meeting to Board Book Meeting. That is why the Recording Secretary sent each member a complete packet with all attachments for tonight's meeting. In the near future members can view the documents online.

2. Public Comment

Dr. Nugent read four emails from community members regarding mask wearing in the Fall. Emails are attached to these minutes.

Dr. Nugent called on virtual audience members to participate in public comment.

Kim Tondreau and Calla Thompson asked about the PK wait list. They were told that a PK discussion would follow later on in the meeting.

Magan Gallant asked if information from the emails that were read would be shared. Dr. Nugent stated they would be posted with the minutes.

Kyle Avery believes in freedom of choice with regard to mask wearing. He asked that the board look at the following UTUBE Video: 9knhuu7ba4.

3. Consent Agenda

Accepted as presented.

4. Superintendent's Reports/Updates

Dr. Seitsinger noted that weather is becoming very inconsistent. He reminded everyone that foul weather plans must be in place. He also explained that there are disruptions in food production and delivery. This will definitely affect our school lunch menu. The Board will be negotiating with the Preston's Administrators' Union and the Teachers' EAP Union in 2021-2022.

There is a wait list for PK. Both sections are filled. Grade K also has high enrollment numbers in both classrooms. Mr. Bernier is calling all PK/K families to ensure that their enrollment paperwork is in order.

The number one priority for re-opening schools is social emotional health based on the school survey and focus groups.

a. Masking:

Dr. Seitsinger stated that he respects and appreciates all community member comments. As Superintendent, he must keep the best interest of all students and staff in mind. He has sought direction from legal counsel, the CDC, the DPH, and the CT Dept of Ed. They all strongly recommend wearing masks. Therefore schools will open with everyone wearing masks; in school and on buses. Preston schools will routinely re-evaluate this standing. We will maintain high touch cleaning, 3ft social distancing, and no visitors will be allowed without appointments. All local Superintendents are in agreement and will follow this same plan.

Quarantining: 7-10 days for people within 3 ft of one another for 15 minutes = close contact. Even fully vaccinated people should be tested. No quarantine if no symptoms and fully vaccinated.

The state has agreed to provide voluntary testing for staff and students beginning in mid-September. This will be conducted by a 3rd party. The Board and the Superintendent are culpable if someone becomes sick and we are not following recommended guidelines.

Board discussion followed.

b. ARPA Funding:

The Regional Recovery Steering Committee is placing an emphasis on early childhood education, mental wellness, and housing.

c. Staff Action and Review:

Tom O'Connor, our Food Service Director, planned to resign to pursue another aspect of his career, but is putting his decision on hold due to the food supply chain problem. Dr. Seitsinger admires his decision and support of Preston Schools.

Dr. Seitsinger recommends that the Board hire an additional grade K teacher and also prepares to consider hiring an additional PK teacher.

Mr. Bernier stated that the current Grade K numbers are 20 and 21, with 7 more families still completing residency packets. In grade PK the enrollment numbers are 17 and 17 with 10 additional students on a wait list. A lengthy Board discussion followed. A virtual special BOE meeting was set for Monday, August 16th at 7pm. The Board requested data outlining financial implications of hiring these teachers prior to Monday night.

d. Summer Program:

Chris Pickett; Summer School Coordinator, and Sarah Cahill; Mystic Seaport Director, have formed a great partnership. This year's summer school program has been very successful and enjoyable for students.

e. Flexibilities for Implementing the CT Guidelines for Educator Evaluation: These guidelines will be finalized soon. The topic will be revisited at the September meeting.

f. ARP/ESSER Update:

The following are just some of the items incorporated into this grant application:

- Continuation of summer school for at least 2 more years
- PD for staff
- Administrative tasks

Money to pay para-educators to attend faculty meetings
BCBA training and social emotional health
Science coaching
Prioritizing curriculum areas
Smaller class sizes/outdoor classrooms
Innovative partnerships
Library resources promoting equity and inclusiveness
Archery and other innovative PE materials
Tutoring
Upgrading communication with families; new website
Replace air conditioners as necessary

The grant application requires a letter of support from the BOE. Dr. Nugent drafted one for the Board's review.

Moved, to present the letter of support from the BOE to Dr. Seitsinger for the grant application. Raymond/Harris. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

5. Principal and Special Education Director Reports

Ann Perzan: 22 special education students attended ESY this summer. Ann is undergoing extensive training in new 504 and IEP software. It will assist greatly with data availability.

Dr. Davis-Tomczuk: 20% of staff members have changed at PPMS. The team hired several skilled and competent faculty and staff members.

Ray Bernier: Preparing for social distancing. Will be promoting handwashing, smaller lunch waves in the cafe, etc.

6. Policy Review

Policy 4121 Substitute Teachers (2nd read)

Moved, to accept the revisions incorporated into Policy 4121. Luty/Harris. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

7. Expenditure/Projection Report

John Spang reviewed the summary for the 2020-2021 school year. Approximately 117,000 dollars will be returned to the Town. A few more bills from FY21 must be paid first.

The auditors came in for their pre-audit of 2020-2021.

Paving has begun on the PPMS parking lot.

Mr. Spang shared the memo which outlines the distribution of the 120,000 dollar budget reduction for FY22.

Moved, to approve the recommendations for FY22 budget adjustments as presented. Raymond/Harris. unanimous. Motion Carries.

8. Adjournment

Moved, to adjourn the meeting at 10:10PM. Harris/Luty. Unanimous. Motion Carries.



Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Re: Masks

1 message

Roy Seitsinger <seitsingerr@prestonschools.org>

Mon, Aug 9, 2021 at 12:00 PM

To: Amanda Phelps <phelpsusn@gmail.com>, Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Good morning Amanda,

Thank you for your thoughtfulness. I will share this email with the Board tonight. I think the general metrics you describe may be helpful. The current Governors' Executive Order expires on September 30. In that message, masking is strongly recommended. The southeastern Connecticut health directors and DPH also recommending masking. Interestingly, there may also be insurance and legal consequences for the Board if they move against the recommendations. Essentially, if they act against the recommendations insurers may not indemnify the Board and thus they would be personally liable for illness and other consequences.

Either Sean or I will read your email tonight.

Thank you again. Be well.

Roy

Roy M. Seitsinger, Jr., Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Follow me on Facebook: **Preston Panthers Superintendent**

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FIND YOUR PURPOSE: Be informed, Not inflamed ! (RMS)

"We are all traveling through time together. Let's do our best to relish this remarkable ride!" (unknown)

" Take care of yourself. Take care of each other. Take care of this place." Frey, Fisher, Smith (2019).

On Mon, Aug 9, 2021 at 11:52 AM Amanda Phelps <phelpsusn@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Roy,

As we await the Governor's mandate on masking for the upcoming school year, I understand that you and the Board of Education have a tough conversation ahead of you this evening. I can surmise from the BoE Agenda, that there will be discussion about the use of masks for the upcoming school year. I understand the position that you are in wanting to keep the entire Community safe from harm. I understand the other side of the argument, as well, that some feel that masks are not useful and can be damaging to the physical and social-emotional health of our Community. I am not fanatical either way. I would rather have our Community wear masks than have virtual learning and/or no in-person activities, but I can appreciate the idea that it doesn't have to be either/or.

If the Governor allows districts to make the decision on their own, I would request that Preston's decision be re-evaluated on a frequent (perhaps monthly) basis. If community spread warrants masks (according to the actual data, not haphazard observations by Community members) then we use them. If community spread does not support the need for masks (by the same metric), we don't. After all the upheaval of the past year and a half, switching between masks/no masks is an easy change and I think that Community members would appreciate the careful weighing of their concerns and the data.

I do not envy your position and I recognize that you and the Board will act in "the abundance of caution," I just think that there has to be a way to bring people on both sides of this argument to the center. I realize that the "buck stops" with you and the Board, but having an open and honest dialogue about the topic will help cool tempers and will allow those who feel strongly either way to speak their piece. Masks and other controversies will come and go, the notion that we are a Community that respects one another and communicates well is long-lasting.

I will not be able to join tonight's meeting, but please know that my thoughts are with you all!

Sincerely,
Amanda Phelps



Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Board of Ed meeting letter

1 message

AMY CHMELECKI <amyfc@comcast.net>

Mon, Aug 9, 2021 at 11:58 AM

To: "homiskig@prestonschools.org" <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Good afternoon,

I am a parent of two teenagers that use the transportation to NFA as well as Grasso Tech. I am writing to express my concerns about the masks mandate being continued for the children in schools as well as on the busses . I have children that have been affected just as all have been by the last year and half, some children express it and others do not . The youth have had to perceive through many unknown days, weeks, months and now years with having no consistency to their schedules and routines they once had. I have children that do have 504 plans in place for such health concerns that the masks are actually amplifying which is one of many reasons that I am writing this to you, the board of education .

I do believe that we can all do better for the children in society and in our community, having to endure the extreme levels of change that is occurring. I am asking for choice, some parents may feel protected by their child using a mask where as others prefer letting their child breathe without obstruction and seeing smiles which is so important . The psychological disturbance for children by blocking their mouths is so damaging and the studies as well as knowledge even prior to now . Their are children who need to read lips and have sensory issues that seeing a persons smile is all they need to reassure them as well as confidence in themself.

I will additionally say that I am not addressing this issue to make waves, I am genuinely worried about the health of children in our community as well as the entire nation . I appreciate your attention to this matter without judgement to those who want choice and why we are bringing this forward .

I would also like to express that I do not judge others who prefer a mask at all times, we must do better with one another and especially in the small town of Preston .

Thank you,

Amy A Fournier



Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Public comment for BOE meeting tonight

1 message

Dawn Stanford <dawnmfoleystanford@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 9, 2021 at 10:38 AM

To: homiskig@prestonschools.org, tdtuckdrop@hotmail.com, dbggrabarek@sbcglobal.net, h-daniel@sbcglobal.net, hfb95@aol.com, s.t.nuge@gmail.com, seitsinger@prestonschools.org, craymond@99main.com

Dear BOE,

I am writing to you as a concerned taxpayer, parent, and as an educator with over 20 years of experience working with children of all ages from infants to grade 12. I have an associates degree in Early Childhood Education and a Bachelor's degree in Liberal & Professional Studies with concentrations in Early Childhood Education and Human Development. I know that Covid is a serious virus that can and does cause serious illness and death. I have personally lost loved ones to this horrible virus. I also know people with severe health conditions that survived without any adverse effects. I also personally know people who died from the vaccine (doctor verified).

I know as an educator that children learn best without distractions. I also know children learn through verbal and non verbal communications. The wearing of masks by children is a distraction to them and causes disruption in verbal and non verbal communication. There is scientific evidence proving this. I am providing a link to the relevant Scientific review of evidence based data that I am referencing. It is a long read. However, I would appreciate it if you read it in full before making your decision on masking or unmasking our children on buses and in schools. Pay particular attention to section 3.14 Paediatric Side Effects and Hazards. Wearing of masks can and does exacerbate previous health conditions such as Asthma and Anxiety, my son has both. Virtual learning was not a viable option for him and as most schools are not providing that option this year many students and their parents will be forced to make difficult decisions if you mandate masks for everyone. I implore you to make it a choice as to whether a child wears a mask or not.

Our children have had their education disrupted long enough. The Science backs giving parents and students the choice to mask or not. Here in CT the mortality rate has been steadily declining and is at almost zero. Yes the delta variant is more transmissible, however data in CT is showing that it is not more deadly. The week of May 14th-May 20th the mortality rate in CT was 2.59% with a positivity rate of 1.17%. (Information pulled directly from state of CT). The mortality rate does lag as most Covid deaths occur 18 days after onset of symptoms so I will give you the data in 3 week intervals. I started with the week of May 14th-May 20th because that was when the mask mandate was lifted here in CT.

May 28th-June 3rd the mortality rate was 2.78% and the positivity rate was .89%, June 18th-June 24th the mortality rate was 2.26% and the positivity rate was .46% (This was the week it was reported that the Delta variant had been detected in CT), July 2nd-July 8th the mortality rate .24% and a positivity rate of .66%, July 16th-July 22nd the mortality rate was .31% and the positivity rate was 1.83%, and last week July 30th-Aug 5th the mortality rate was .09% and the positivity rate was 2.96%. As you can see as the delta variant has taken hold in our state the positivity rate has gone up while the mortality rate has gone down. This is also during no mask mandates. The state of CT stopped reporting daily deaths as of July 1st because death rates have dropped. This was after the Delta variant had taken hold in our state. We have flattened the curve here in CT. Let our kids breathe freely while they learn.

Sincerely,
Dawn Stanford
8 Burdick Rd
Preston CT

Scientific Data mentioned above
Link to the <https://www.mdpi.com/1078850>



Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

BOE meeting tonight

1 message

Sarah Minei <sarahluds@comcast.net>
To: Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Mon, Aug 9, 2021 at 12:12 PM

Hi Gloria,

I was just on the website and noticed that I need to submit this letter prior to 12 noon today in order for the comment to be "summarized" at tonight's meeting.

I ask the Board of Education to consider pioneering the "unmask our kids movement" and allow students to attend school in the Fall 2021 mask free. There are many studies to support that masks are in fact not effective and cause more harm than good which I will send in a separate email, I just want it to be on record that I vehemently oppose mask wearing especially in schools.

Perhaps a waiver/ opt out form parents can sign so that students do not have to wear masks.

Here is a video link that is relevant from a functional family medicine physician in Indiana:

<https://twitter.com/SebGorka/status/1424603849952829442>

Thank you for the opportunity to share my opinion and your consideration of my suggestions are appreciated.

Sincerely,

Sarah Minei