

River Valley School District
Thursday, March 10, 2022
Regular Meeting
Middle School Library
7:00 p.m.

Present: Nelson, Jennings, Iausly, Bettinger, Maier, Young, Carstensen, Cates, Minich, Morgan Brickl (Student Representative)

Absent: N/A

Admin: Glasbrenner, Krey, Peterson, Blakley, Radtke

Others: Mark Wedige, Dave Chapman, Heather Kramer, Denise Melanowski, Michelle Orcutt, Dan Machovec, Dr. Furukawa, Shawn Duren, Paula Wedige (Administrative Assistant)

President Jennings opened the meeting. She noted that the meeting had been properly posted and notice had been provided to the appropriate media and each School Board Member. Iausly moved to proceed with the legal meeting. Maier seconded. Motion carried.

Consideration & Action on Approval of Agenda

Young moved to approve the agenda. Iausly seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comments

Mark Wedige, parent from Arena, noted his children have medical exemptions to not wear masks. He noted that statistics show low death rates from COVID for ages 0-17, with drowning and suicide higher. He has shared emails with the Board noting that he feels we are hurting our children with wearing masks. He added that vaccinated adults are more likely to die than unvaccinated children and that every adult teacher has had the option to be vaccinated.

Dave Chapman, parent from Spring Green, thinks we should leave masking policy as is. He noted there have been only 3 instances since we started tracking where there were 0 cases in all schools. COVID keeps evolving and he feels it is too soon to get rid of our policy. He stated the Board and Policy Committee have spent countless hours of debate to define the current policy and to find a working compromise. We can ramp up or down based on numbers and still have no mandatory masking in schools. He wants to keep the policy active so we can make decisions quickly if needed and be proactive instead of reactive.

Student Council Report

Morgan Brickl noted that the high school district solo/ensemble will be held on March 12 with the state event on April 30. The jazz band will perform on March 17 at the Gard Theater and March 22 in Fennimore. Thanks to the community for support of the recent POPS concert. It was noted that forensics participants are having a successful start to the season.

Update on Community Referendum Information Sessions

Glasbrenner and Krey have been holding community information sessions with little turnout but with good questions by attendees. Krey noted he recorded several short informational videos related to the referendum and they are posted on the district website.

One of the main questions being asked is, "Why is there a stadium upgrade project when we are asking for a referendum?" Krey explained that monies for the stadium upgrade project will not come from referendum dollars. During discussions over the last few years of the need to

resurface the track using budgeted monies, we found more repairs needed below the surface of the track and with drainage. At some point, synthetic turf was looked at as an option for return on investment and 5 times the potential use by students over a grass field. With private donations covering half of the project cost, the district is paying \$150,000 less for a synthetic turf field than we would have paid for a grass field.

A second main question has been, “Why is there a referendum every 3 years?” Krey replied that revenues from the state have not increased in a decade. We keep our expenditures down, but we do not get adequate revenue from the state. Glasbrenner offered to meet with any small groups that want him to share referendum information.

Update on School District Operations from Administration

Peterson noted that there were several guest readers, including Board members, district office staff, and Officer Kurek, at the elementary buildings for Read Across America Day. Tuesday night was parent night for new 4K students. There was a good turnout with 10 more expected before school ends and 10 more over the summer.

Radtke noted that 8th graders visited UW-Platteville for a careers field trip. Middle school solo/ensemble will be March 12. Staff is looking at scheduling for next year. The Forward Exam will be in April. Some middle school students attended a math contest and most earned silver medals.

Blakley noted that the POPS concert was unbelievable! Students will take the ACT on Tuesday. Some high school students attended a math contest and our school earned more medals than any other school in the conference. Work is being done on schedules for next year. Seniors are filling out scholarship applications.

Board Reminders, Announcements, and Training Opportunities

None.

Legislative Update

Glasbrenner noted that legislators are out of session for the year. The Weather Board has left behind winter worries and is now sending information about spring flooding.

Consent Agenda: - Checks, Invoices, Receipts – February 2022; Open Session Meeting Minutes – February 10, 2022, Regular Meeting

Maier moved to approve the consent agenda items as submitted. Iausly seconded. Motion carried.

Consideration & Action on Request for Sabbatical Leave

Erik Johnson, High School Science Teacher, submitted a request for a sabbatical leave for the 2022-23 school year in order to improve science teaching by taking additional courses as well as to have more time available to focus on family. The Board discussed this item last month and asked administration to post a one-year vacancy to see if there were any interested candidates. There was one interested candidate, but only if the position was a full-time permanent position.

There was discussion about wanting to do what is best for the employee and the students. The employee is not interested in a reduced work schedule for next year and would like action tonight. Blakley noted when hiring a long term substitute, it puts a strain on the other employees

in the department. It was noted that students have already lost a lot in the last two years. An unfilled position would mean some classes would be cancelled. It was suggested that we make it a requirement that the employee return to work after the sabbatical or to remove the guarantee of a position upon return, but it was noted that either would require changes to Employee Handbook language. Bettinger noted that this could be a one year struggle for a multiple year gain.

Iausly moved to grant a sabbatical leave for Erik Johnson for the 2022-23 school year. Young seconded. Roll call vote:

For the motion: Bettinger, Nelson

Against the motion: Young, Maier, Iausly, Jennings, Minich, Cates, Carstensen

Abstain: N/A

Absent: N/A

Polled vote was 2-7 in the affirmative. Motion failed.

Consideration & Action on 2022-23 CESA #5 Contract

Bettinger moved to approve the 2022-23 CESA #5 Contract. Young seconded. Motion carried.

Consideration & Action on Resolutions Accepting Resignations, if any

None.

Consideration & Action on Hirings, if any

None.

Consideration & Action on Policy Committee Recommendations

The Policy Committee discussed possible changes to the Instructional Model for the 2021-22 School Year but there were no recommendations from the Committee. The full Board will discuss tonight. One revision to the Instructional Model will be to remove the reference to masks required on school buses since they are no longer in CDC's definition of public transportation.

Glasbrenner noted that the CDC has new guidelines to follow when determining when to mask. Using CDC, our area currently has a "low" indicator. At the same time, DHS is using different metrics, and our area currently has a "high" indicator. The DHS is considering moving to CDC indicators. Since CDC and DHS don't currently match, we need to determine which to follow, if either. Glasbrenner feels that the CDC is nationwide and is heard more by the public than DHS while also noting that many area districts have dropped using thresholds and masking requirements altogether. Other options are to put our Instructional Model on hold for now or to keep using but change our internal thresholds. Dr. Furukawa agrees that the CDC community levels are a better gatekeeper to trigger when to mask and we could still use our internal thresholds.

The administrative team would like to look at our internal thresholds, which require a building to mask when positive cases are at 1% in that building. They feel a 2.5% threshold is more reasonable now based on increased vaccination status, CDC guidelines, and education ideals for youngest kids. Dr. Furukawa does not agree with increasing to 2.5%, but feels the current building thresholds of 5, 4, 3, 2 could be changed to 5, 4, 4, 4, which only changes the numbers for the elementary buildings.

Iausly does not want to change to using CDC community levels as a trigger. He noted DHS has not discussed taking down their web page and are planning to evolve it. Dr. Furukawa noted that just counting cases doesn't help as much for decision-making because vaccinated and previously infected people may test positive, but not overrun the medical system. The CDC is looking at public health and hospital use and he feels we should move closer to CDC indicators to identify when a community is in trouble based on hospital use, and then use our internal thresholds to determine whether to mask. In our area, hospital beds are available, so we are currently "low" per CDC. Young likes using the CDC community levels data since it doesn't just look at case counts. Iausly thinks the CDC community levels data is too new and not fully understood yet.

Maier asked to discuss internal thresholds, which were originally at 5% until we lowered them to 1%. Jennings noted that this discussion regarding possible changes to the Instructional Model will continue later during this meeting under the next item on the agenda.

As recommended by the Policy Committee, Young moved to waive the first reading and approve the second reading of 728 Wearing Masks and Face Coverings to change the word "recommended" to "optional" for wearing masks on the district campus and to take off the reference to masks required on buses since school buses are no longer in the definition of public transportation. Maier seconded. Motion carried.

As recommended by the Policy Committee, Bettinger moved to approve the second reading of the following policies: 662 Debt Management; 535 Professional Staff Development Opportunities; and 535.1 Teacher Mentoring (PI-34). Cates seconded. Motion carried.

As recommended by the Policy Committee, Jennings moved to approve the first reading of the following policies, all related to nondiscrimination and Title IX: 411 Nondiscrimination/Equal Education Opportunities; 411.2 Student Harassment/Sexual Harassment; 413 Gender-Based Harassment and Discrimination; 524.3 Rule Procedure for Handling Harassment/Sexual Harassment Complaints; 511 Equal Opportunity Employment; 511 Rule Employee Nondiscrimination Complaint Procedures; 524.3 Harassment/Sexual Harassment; 411 Rule Student Nondiscrimination Complaint Procedures; 411.1 Rule/411.2 Rule Procedure for Filing Harassment/Sexual Harassment Complaint; 411.1 Exhibit 1/411.2 Exhibit 1 Bullying/Harassment Report (High School Online Form). Maier seconded. Motion carried.

Consideration & Action on Modifying Instructional Model for the 2021-22 School Year

Maier suggested not using CDC as a trigger of when to consider masking, but to instead increase internal thresholds to 5% since he feels they are currently too low. Iausly wants to use DHS metrics until the end of the school year and then reevaluate. Nelson agrees.

Cates moved to use the CDC community levels for when to mask and if the CDC shows "high," the district will analyze internal data and may implement building thresholds for masking. Minich seconded. Role call vote:

For the motion: Bettinger, Young, Maier, Jennings, Minich, Cates, Carstensen

Against the motion: Iausly, Nelson

Abstain: N/A

Absent: N/A

Polled vote was 7-2 in the affirmative. Motion carried.

It was clarified that if the CDC indicates a “high” level for Sauk, Iowa, or Richland county, that will trigger the district to analyze internal data. Then, if any of our schools meet the internal thresholds we have set, that building will mask.

Bettinger moved to change the building masking thresholds to be 3.5% of students and staff at a building. Cates seconded. That changes the current thresholds to 15 cases at the high school, 14 cases at the middle school, 11 cases at the elementary, and 5 cases at the ELC.

Dr. Furukawa commented that by increasing to these numbers, you are allowing buildings to get to a high level where student and staff attendance is questionable. This also poses a threat to overrun the hospitals. Bettinger noted masking in schools is not representative of the community where no one is masking anywhere else.

Peterson noted she is in favor of lower thresholds to mask, such as 5, 4, 4, 4 so we are not strapped with staffing issues like we were in January, which was tough on the mental and physical health of staff.

Young feels internal thresholds do seem low now but doesn't think we need to change thresholds if we move to using CDC community levels as a trigger. Cates noted there are other issues in hospitals besides COVID that affect available beds. She feels we have been cautious and it is not beneficial to students to continue with this same level of caution since she doesn't feel the spread is happening in our schools. She is comfortable increasing our thresholds.

Dr. Furukawa feels a smaller change of using CDC community levels and 5, 4, 4, 4 as thresholds will address much of the issue. While he agrees that there is a higher risk of spread in restaurants and at family events, he feels schools are stewards of public health and can be a part of reduction of transmission since we don't have control of public areas, but schools do.

Role call vote:

For the motion: Bettinger, Young, Maier, Jennings, Cates, Carstensen

Against the motion: Iausly, Nelson, Minich

Abstain: N/A

Absent: N/A

Polled vote was 6-3 in the affirmative. Motion carried.

Consideration & Action on Budget/ERC Committee Recommendations

As recommended by the Committee, Iausly moved to approve adding “Grow Your Own Contact” language to the 2021-22 Employee Handbook. Young seconded. This language allows the district to pay for an employee to obtain a teaching license. The contract would require the employee to remain at the district for a specific length of time or pay liquidated damages to the district. Motion carried.

As recommended by the Committee, Young moved to reinstate the 2020-21 paid COVID leave program for 2021-22 for staff that test positive for COVID and miss work, retroactive to September 1, 2021. Minich seconded. This program allows a maximum of 80 hours of paid

COVID leave during the 2021-22 school year. Krey noted we had 30 staff test positive so far this year. Roll call vote:

For the motion: Carstensen, Cates, Jennings, Maier, Nelson, Young, Minich

Against the motion: Bettinger, Iausly

Abstain: N/A

Absent: N/A

Polled vote was 7-2 in the affirmative. Motion carried.

As recommended by the Committee, Iausly moved to increase the pay for substitute support staff from \$11 to \$12 per hour. Maier seconded. Motion carried.

The Committee reviewed the list of potential cuts if the referendum fails, which was included in the boxholder mailing regarding the referendum. Krey noted that 78% of the budget is staffing. These cuts would cover \$1.2 million. The district would then discuss the need for another referendum in November 2022. The Committee will discuss health insurance rates in the near future and the audit contract renewal later this fall.

Consideration & Action on Resolutions Accepting Gifts, if any

Maier moved to adopt the Resolutions Accepting Gifts as follows: steel sheets valued at \$400 from Mathy Construction to River Valley SkillsUSA Chapter; \$100 from Irene Frank to FFA (in memory of Ralph Frank); \$200 from Spring Green Community Church Cookie Walk Committee to Fund 21 for families in need. Minich seconded. Polled vote was 8-0 in the affirmative with Bettinger abstaining. Motion carried.

Maier moved to adopt the Resolution Accepting Gifts of \$5,000 from Westbrook Associated Engineers, Inc. for the Stadium Upgrade Project. Iausly seconded. Polled vote was 9-0 in the affirmative. Motion carried.

Consideration & Action to Adjourn to Closed Session Pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes 19.85(1)(f) for Discussion of Request for Use of Reimbursable Leave Sharing Program

Minich moved to adjourn to closed session at 8:51 pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes 19.85(1)(f) for Discussion of Request for Use of Reimbursable Leave Sharing Program. Carstensen seconded. Polled vote was 8-1 in the affirmative with Bettinger against the motion. Motion carried.

The Board reconvened in open session at 9:01 p.m.

Consideration & Action on Request for Use of Reimbursable Leave Sharing Program

Cates moved to approve 31.75 hours from the Reimbursable Leave Sharing Program for Lisa Brown. Carstensen seconded. Motion carried with Bettinger opposed.

Maier moved to adjourn at 9:02 p.m. Carstensen seconded. Motion carried.

Submitted by Paula Wedige for:

 Deborah Nelson, School District Clerk