

**Minutes
Special Meeting
Cumberland CUSD #77
Cumberland High School
July 26, 2021**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by President Wes Chambers. Members present included Pam Ross, Ben Bland, Steve Layton, Howard Markwell, Beth Reeder and Josh McElravy. Others present included Elementary Principal, Daniel Huffman, Middle School Principal, Stacy Keyser and Todd Butler, Superintendent. Visitors present were: Jenny Finley, Todd Hall, Julie Ozier, Janel Haga, Becky Powers, Beth Cornwell, Jamie Whitaker, Chris and Katie Dittamore, Jack Bierman, Kelly Cox, Lisa Jones, Clay and Jennie Stults, Randy Hurt, Brad and Traci Becker, Tony and Lyn Carlen, Kimberly Keck, Chad and Beth Glanzer, Jerod Burton, John Wormhoudt, Nancy and Jeff McElravy, Brian and Kelli Stierwalt, Rayna McElravy, Dustin Thornton, Logan and Macie Boyd, Kenzi Easton, Curtis Walker, Sydney Robinson, Lisa Dittamore, Dawn Peters, DeDe McElravy, Madelyn McElravy, Katie McElravy, Janene Dittamore, Nathan and Kristi Shirley, Rhonda Walsh, Andy Thoele, Kayla Aaron, Andrea Murphy, Sam Strohl, Sydney Tipton, Jim Smith, Lyndsey Finn, Bill and Sherry Kearns, Rose Weber, Nathaniel and Michele Figgins, Tyler Figgins, Jake and Micki Bradley, Danita Timmons, Racheal and Matthew Sudkamp, Theron and Peggy Kuhn, Heather Kemper, Megan Dittamore, Joanie Rauch, Tara Watson, Shalynn Brant, Nicholas McClain, Jen and Brian Vahling, Matt Sowers, Amy McMechan.

The Board and guests started the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The president and board members reviewed the reopening school plan draft for the 2021-2022 school year. Board comments are listed below.

President Chambers asked if board members had any questions and concerns. Josh McElravy asked about masks being required on school buses. Mr. Chambers stated that it was a federal mandate for masks on school buses.

The President welcomed members of the audience and asked if there was any public comment concerning the reopening school plan draft for the 2021-2022 school year. He asked that anyone that has questions come to the microphone and state their name.

Public comments are listed below:

Lyndsey Finn, first of all, wanted to compliment Mr. Butler on putting out the letter on behalf of the district and the other members of the district. She was very appreciative of that. She asked for those of us to show if they have a mask. Two individuals had a mask. She pointed out how far apart all the board members were and everyone in the crowd, are they correctly social distancing? She is advocating for our children that she doesn't want masks in school. She brought up the question, what about the masks being required on the bus?

Sherry Kearns came to the microphone. She has two students in middle school and one in high school. Take into consideration making masks optional. She knows that Cumberland did a wonderful job keeping our kids safe last year. The pandemic is not over. Going back to mask mandates is uncalled for at any point. Anyone who is medically able, should get a vaccine. It's not up to the board as to when this pandemic ends, but it's up to each of us to decide for our children. In recent football and basketball seasons, many individuals were not wearing masks. How was that effective and what message was being said? She asked each of her kids about student and staff conversations about masks being worn. Each of her children stated that "each and every student, all day, every day, in every class, teachers are constantly telling students to pull up their masks and put them on correctly." What difference does it make to tell our students, but not our athletes about wearing masks and then not expecting our athletes to wear masks, but our students had to. Masks interrupt the overall school day and the class discussion during the school day. Technically, hands should be washed every time a mask is touched. Is this really happening? I doubt it. How many came to school with the same cloth mask day after day after day and not washed. I'm sure my own children did this. We had a full gym at graduation with no masks. Everyone has been together for months, maskless. Masks will not serve a purpose in the 2021-22 school year when we have already been around each other over and over for a long time not wearing masks.

Lyndsey Finn commented, "I know that one of you sitting up there was at a Jeep run this past weekend with over two hundred Jeeps and over 700 people. Just know that I can show a video with you in it when you weren't away from others, unmasked, and spaced where you should be".

Nathaniel Figgins stated that he has never written a speech. He's just pissed off. He farms, owns property, raises cattle, is a husband and father, and owns his own business. We shouldn't have to be here. We put you here to take care of our kids. He stated that anyone in construction, knows that masks are a mess. A mask is just a petri dish. There are so many germs and sicknesses in masks and they need to go away. He wants the board to make decisions that make sense and for our community's best interest.

Katie Dittamore addressed the board by saying thank you to Mr. Butler for helping to keep our kids safe this past year. Anybody that has kids knows that this past year has been impossible. My daughter didn't get to have kindergarten orientation last year, but the kindergarten teachers still kicked ass last year. Her daughter will be in first grade and she doesn't know where the cafeteria is. These are important events in a child's school experience. She is willing to help fund the schools so her child can have the best opportunity possible, right here. Her question was, "What are we going to do in four months? How are we going to respond if the state tells us to do something that isn't in the best interest of our children?" She encouraged the board to consider this.

Lisa Jones came to the microphone. She stated she appreciated everything the school district did last year, you kept our kids in school when other kids were at home. I am not a fan of masks. My concern is for students who are not eligible for the vaccine. She will not allow her children to be told that they have to get the vaccine. Please keep my kids safe if they are in

school. I want to know if my kids are going to receive credit if they have to be quarantined. Can they learn from home remotely during that time? She will not judge anyone else on their choice of vaccination. She does not wish to experiment with her children's future and with getting the vaccine.

Chris Dittamore came to the microphone. I graduated 24 years ago from here. I never thought we would ever get to this point. He referenced the reopening plan that states that the CDC recommends that children 2 and above wear a mask. The next line states that masks are a choice for our parents and children. He wishes that it could be the parents' decision to make on behalf of the kids. At the June meeting, he felt that board members were being driven to make decisions based on the state withholding money. Mr. Butler said that he was unsure of how far the State would go. Chris stated that the State of IL will continue to threaten and will continue to take whatever they can get ahold of. He has worked for the state for over 20 years and they always threaten with little action. He hopes the board decides to act on behalf of the students and not be driven by the State in making their decisions.

Macie Boyd shared some information she gathered herself over the past few months. First, she said, thank you from the bottom of her heart for all you have done and I am sure that I know that all of the board has dealt with many phone calls and threatening messages over the past weeks. She is the youth director at Jewett Community Church. They have been attending in-person church since July of 2020. Masks have always been optional while attending church. They have offered them at the door. There are 20-30 kids per week that have and are attending meetings at the church. They haven't been social distancing for the past several months. One student tested positive from the church and that did not come from a church function. She also had a positive Covid test from a trip to Tennessee in 2020. They wore masks everywhere they went and ate meals in their cabin to be extra careful. They didn't want to bring anything home to her husband's mom. She passed away this year, but not from Covid. We tried to protect everyone, but at the end of it, our time comes and only God knows when that time is. No paper mask is going to change God's plan for any of us. She advocates for kids to be maskless. She doesn't want to have kids masked on the bus. Her son would ride the bus and complain about being so hot wearing his mask. She would like to encourage the board to consider keeping masks optional in every setting even as we move forward. Thank you for all you do for our kids and our community and God bless all of you!

Rachel Sudkamp came to the microphone next. She stated that she attended in June. She spoke her peace then and she would like to speak about masking on the bus. She stated that it doesn't get specific on how we are going to mandate the bus expectations. Her children's bus driver is Connie Harris and they knew her prior to the mask. She made a point, what about the new kids coming in and being scared of their driver because they don't know them and can't see their face? She shared that her daughter was so scared to play soccer because of an unfamiliar man who was in a mask. She was just so afraid of that man in the mask. Rachel asked the tall man, who is our local judge, to just drop his mask down for a few seconds so her daughter could see his face. After that moment, she was no longer afraid. Rachel is concerned about the kids' first experiences on the bus and the driver having to wear a mask. She asked, "Is there

a loophole in this regulation? Is there more we can do? I want to back everyone else's comment about this and where are you going to stand in a few months? It's going to change in the future, we all know this. What is the board going to do then?"

Theron Kuhn approached the mic. He asked, "Is there such a thing as a Cumberland Citizen vote on whether to have masks or not have masks in school? Why can't we do this? Why can't we bring it to a public vote with the community? What would it mean if the state took away your 5.5 million dollars? Do we even need it? Maybe we don't want what it is used for? Are the people willing to vote for this? If it passed, Cumberland County voted for it. If it doesn't pass, then it is stated. Let the people vote, the board members should not have to make this decision. We shouldn't have to have our children living in fear. He feels that the purpose of the masks is from the government, the government is driven to put fear in people. Is that stupid or what? That's about as simple as it could be".

Josh McElravy made the motion that we amend the plan to make masks optional on the bus. Beth Reeder seconded the motion.

Howard Markwell asked if it's a federal guideline. Mr. Butler nodded in affirmation.

Mr. McElravy stated, "It should not be considered public transportation. Parents can't get on the bus and ride. It is the same kids, same bus on the same route. The bus driver would not pick a man up on the Toledo square and haul him around. In my mind, that is not public transportation."

Mr. Markwell asked if there was any federal funding for transportation and Mr. Butler stated that there is no federal revenue for transportation. Transportation funds are from local and state revenue.

Lyndsey Finn asked for clarification on the money from the federal government and what it was being spent on. Mr. Butler outlined that we have received assistance from CARES ACT funds and the ESSER II and ESSER III monies. The ESSER III revenue hasn't been awarded yet. He outlined that many projects would need to be completed to make this happen. Within the grant, there are checkboxes asking about the mitigations addressed in the reopening plan. These must be addressed in the grant application in order to qualify for the money. The largest expenditure would be ventilation. Construction and design by architects and engineers is not an easy or quick project. The overall goal is to get bad air out and good air in. I feel this is the best way to help keep our students and staff as safe and healthy as possible. Again, this is not a quick project; it would involve a huge amount of work in our older buildings, work that couldn't begin until summer of 2022 if the ESSER III grant is approved.

Pam Ross stated that the district wanted to receive the 1.6 dollars for an improved HVAC system which would impact all of the students and staff's daily lives while at school.

We are fulfilling our duties to apply for these grants. Part of this grant requirement is the reopening plan and receiving public input.

Pam Ross asked if it is a choice for students in the classrooms then why can't they have the choice on the busses? This discussion and actions is just one of the things on the check boxes in the grant application to secure the funding. Mr. Butler believes that the drivers should be watching the road to avoid accidents and keep the students safe that are riding. We really don't want them focusing on the rearview mirror policing masks.

Howard Markwell asked, "If the school board doesn't follow through on this, what will happen?"

Ben Bland cautioned the board to consider, "Can any board member be held personally liable if the school board would be sued for not following guidelines?"

President Chambers called for a motion to approve the reopening plan. Josh McElravy made a motion to amend that masks should be optional on busses for students. Some discussion was held among the board members about the motion and how it should be stated. Mr. McElravy stated that someone could amend his motion.

President Chambers made a motion to approve the school district reopening plan for the 2021-2022 school year amended reopening plan. Pam Ross seconded it. Member Ross stated that it will read "drivers and students SHOULD wear a mask" while on busses.

President Wes Chambers asked if there were any further comments or discussion on the school district reopening plan for the 2021-2022 school year. No further comments were heard and a roll call vote was taken. All members voted "yes". The reopening plan was approved.

A motion was made by Steve Layton and seconded by Howard Markwell to move into executive session for the purpose of the discussion of employment 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1) at 6:47 p.m. All present voted "Aye."

The Board entered into open session at 6:54 p.m.

Howard Markwell made the motion to employ Jami Holsapple as a cook pending all required background screenings and district paperwork. It was seconded by Pam Ross. All present voted "Aye".

Steve Layton made the motion to employ Beckie Elliott as a cook pending all required background screenings and district paperwork. It was seconded by Ben Bland. All present voted "Aye".

Wes Chambers made the motion to employ Brad Wilson as a custodian pending all required background screenings and district paperwork. It was seconded by Pam Ross. All present voted "Aye".

Steve Layton made the motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Ben Bland. All present voted "Aye".

The meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted this day, July 26, 2021.

Wes Chambers, President

Ben Bland, Secretary