

MINUTES OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL UNIT 1 BOARD MEETING HELD AT MORSE HIGH SCHOOL on December 20, 2021 AT 6:00 PM. (NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Board. Such action, either to approve or amend and approve, is anticipated at the January 24, 2022 meeting).

Members Present: Steve August, Board Chairperson; Lou Ensel, Vice Chairperson; Anita Brown, Jamie Dorr, Bill Perkins, Lorna Ryan and Jennifer Ritch-Smith; Jonah Smith, Student Representative; Patrick Manuel, Superintendent of Schools

Members Absent: Natalie Emmerson

Others Present: Katie Joseph, Debra Clark, Nate Priest, Dr. Amina Hanna, Dean Emmerson

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson August called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson August acknowledged the passing of Morse High Band Instructor Anthony Marro. Mr. Marro was a beloved and valued member of the RSU 1 community and will be missed by students and staff. Mr. August sent condolences on behalf of the Board to Mr. Marro's family.

Chairperson August stated that this will be his last meeting as a member of the Board and thanked all those that have served on the Board with him and the community for giving him the opportunity to serve the district. Mr. August acknowledged the strength of the RSU 1 Board and felt that this is a Board that works hard and functions very well together.

APPROVE/AMEND MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 22, 2021, DECEMBER 1, 2021 AND DECEMBER 6, 2021

MOTION: Perkins

SECOND: Ensel

VOTE: Board (7-0)
Student (1-0)

TO: Approve the minutes of November 22, 2021, December 1, 2021 and December 6, 2021 as written.

ADJUSTMENTS

Superintendent Manuel recognized Chairperson August for serving on the Board for nine years. Dr. Manuel thanked Mr. August for his thoughtfulness and guidance and wished him the best.

Vice Chairperson Ensel also thanked Mr. August for his leadership and hoped that he will have the opportunity to travel back to Spain.

PUBLIC COMMENT

West Bath parent Maureen Craney addressed the Board to ask them to consider the athletes when discussing the masking policy and encouraged them to look at other options for our students that would include not masking our athletes. Ms. Craney also serves as the President of the Morse All-Sports Boosters Club and reported that the Boosters felt that if our athletes were wearing masks that it wasn't the right time to open the concessions to serve food to the spectators.

Phippsburg resident Tom Sarbanis shared findings from a study in Sweden from the New England Journal of Medicine that followed two million students for four months early in the pandemic and none

of the children died of Covid-19. Masks were suggested during this period of time in Sweden but not required. The study showed that one child per 130,000 and one out of every 5,000 teachers contracted Covid. Mr. Sarbanis shared a conversation he had with this daughter and felt that we have lost our humanity with how we interact with each other. Mr. Sarbanis asked the Board to consider our students and their psychological well-being and suggested that we have a uniform policy for those vaccinated and those unvaccinated.

Bath resident Karen D'Silva shared her concern about the new variant and felt that this is more contagious as people that are vaccinated are also testing positive. In looking at what is best for our children, Ms. D'Silva stated that we need to understand where the danger is at school and look at other ways to help our athletes.

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND INSTRUCTION UPDATE

Assistant Superintendent Katie Joseph reported that in speaking with Vice Chairperson Ensel it was decided that it was too much to bring people together right now to continue the work with the Later School Start Time Committee. Ms. Joseph stated that a decision can't be made without committee meetings with daycare centers, transportation personnel and other groups as well as some larger community meetings. The plan is to bring the committee back together in September to continue the work.

Ms. Joseph reported that the teachers have continued working on curriculum during the late start Wednesdays and the professional development day in November. Last year RSU 1 used the hybrid model, however, this year everyone is supposed to be in school but some students have been learning remotely. Teachers are continuously making adjustments and checking in with their students to make sure they are where they need to be academically.

The NEASC work continues at the high school with a lot of subcommittees meeting to work on reports and self-reflections. Morse Principal Eric Varney is hoping to have the bulk of the work completed by February.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph reported that the Humanities Council that is run by Dawn Lee and Brenda Fagan has been going very well. The council is all about climate change and has been well attended by community members around the district. If interested in joining, please contact Mrs. Lee or Mrs. Fagan at Morse High School to get a copy of the next book. The next meeting will be held in February.

Board member Brown noticed that in some of the administrators' reports this month that some staff have been struggling and asked what the district was doing to offer some self-care opportunities for them. Superintendent Manuel responded that the district will offer some organized professional development related to stress which is scheduled for the Monday after the holiday break and another one near the end of January. Dr. Manuel reported that we are working with a health insurance provider to provide some services that would be unique to RSU 1. Staff has been given the choice of working individually or in a group during the late start Wednesdays so that they feel productive which can help relieve some stress and anxiety moving forward.

STUDENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Student Representative Smith stated that losing Mr. Marro was a pretty big shock for a lot of people who knew him at school and left a big impact. Seniors have begun receiving the college decisions with a couple students receiving responses from early decision schools such as Bowdoin and Yale. Winter athletics are off to a strong start with the girls' basketball team having a 2-0 start to the season and the swim team also doing very well. After the holiday break the focus of the students will be shifting to midterms and finals for the first time since the pandemic.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Superintendent Manuel reported on the following:

- The Board received some articles on *The Hour of Code* which is an introduction to coding at Woolwich and Dike-Newell. Librarians Abby Luchies and Lisa Hardman are working with students to help nurture problem-solving skills, curiosity, logic and creativity. Some of the exercises are web-based, some are paper-based, and some are using the bee bots that we received through a grant.
- Some essential field trips taking place in the district include the 4th grade going to the Maine Maritime Museum to participate in the Sense of Place program and our 5th graders have been traveling to the Gulf of Maine Research Institute.
- Students have been participating in some charitable activities to give back to the community such as a canned food drive and pocket change for charity.
- Bath Middle School 7th graders hosted their expedition culminating activity, Ocean's Night, on December 16th which focused on ocean sustainability and invasive species.
- Superintendent Manuel complimented and thanked staff for all they are doing each day to support students as well as the help they provide in the multiple aspects of Covid-19. Dr. Manuel also extended the district's appreciation to parents and students for their understanding and realizes that the pandemic has posed many challenges for our families.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Business Manager Debra Clark provided the Board with a financial report for the month ending November 30, 2021. Currently \$15 million has been spent out of this year's \$38 million budget. The financial report also showed the encumbered amounts for salaries in the amount of \$15.5 million which will take us through to the end of this school year. The district has received \$18 million or 46% in revenues. As far as the grants are concerned, ESSER I is at 80%, ESSER II is at 78% which includes the encumbered salaries, and we have spent \$140,000 of the ARP fund. The tuition rates haven't been set yet by the state but we have 13 more tuition students than we had budgeted. When looking at tuition revenues and budget versus actual, the district has an increase of \$100,000 in tuition without any change in the rates. Mrs. Clark reported that the salary line is up about \$100,000 which helps when paying our retirees their longevity amount.

Mrs. Clark reported that the audit is complete and copies will be available at the January finance meeting. The Morse High School project has a balance of approximately \$500,000. There are still a few expenses with Harvey and Crooker and once that is complete the state will come in to audit our books.

UPDATE ON HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS/PLAN

Superintendent Manuel reported that the staff vaccination percentages are at 80% or above at each school. The student vaccination rate per school is as follows:

- Bath Middle School – 60%
- Bath Tech – 60%
- Morse High School – 65%
- Woolwich Central School – 58%
- 5-11 years olds are still in process and will be provided next month

Superintendent Manuel reported that across the state over last 30 days there have been 6,639 total reported cases and 275 schools in outbreak status. The numbers of cases in RSU 1 from November 29 to December 17 are as follows:

- Dike-Newell School - 6 positives, 16 quarantines

- Phippsburg School - 5 positives, 5 quarantines
- Fisher-Mitchell School - 2 positives, 11 quarantines
- Woolwich Central School – 10 positives, 17 quarantines
- Bath Middle School - 9 positives, 40 quarantines
- Morse High/Bath Tech – 24 positives, 41 quarantines

Superintendent Manuel reported that it is anticipated that the Maine Board of Occupational Safety and Health will vote soon on the state standards for compliance with the OSHA vaccine mandate. The mandate states that if you have over 100 employees that vaccinations are required or employees would be required to show a weekly negative Covid test. The United States CDC issued new guidance in criteria for schools when responding to a positive case in a school setting which is being reviewed by the Maine CDC. Nurses and administrators will receive a draft of the standing operating procedures over the holiday break before it goes public.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph reported that the district has held two clinics so far for the five through 11 year olds and have around 125 students that were able to either get fully vaccinated or partially vaccinated. Ms. Joseph will be providing a bus to take approximately 30 students to one of the clinics at MidCoast Hospital to make sure that everyone has transportation if needed. The Board will receive an updated report during the January meeting to include the number of younger students that have been vaccinated.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph stated that the district will be using federal money to cover the cost of hiring two medical assistants that have been hired to support our nurses. They are scheduled to begin working on January 3rd.

The number of students and staff participating in pooled testing has increased as of November 1st by 200 which brings the total number of participants to about 1,200 in the district. Ms. Joseph reported that we were using our pooled staff as well as our nurses to do the pooled PCR testing weekly but as it has become harder to get a test, we opened up services so if a student or staff member falls ill during the day they can receive a rapid test in the district.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph shared what the new medical assistants will be doing and what schools will be covered. Dr. Hanna and Ms. Joseph talked about the importance of doing the Covid tests correctly to get accurate results.

SECOND READING OF BOARD POLICIES

Policy CBC – Item I – was revised to add “and administrators.”

MOTION: Perkins

SECOND: Ensel

VOTE: Board (7-0)
Students (1-0)

TO: Approve Policy CB – School Superintendent as written, and Policy CBC – Duties of the Superintendent as amended.

REVISIT WINTER ATHLETICS PROTOCOLS

Superintendent Manuel provided the Board with the percentages of student athletes involved in winter sports that participate in pooled testing and those that have been vaccinated in grades 7 – 12.

Percentage of student athletes that participate in pooled testing:

- Bath Middle School – 51.72%
- Morse High School – 47.86%
- Woolwich Central School – 66.67%

- Student athletes in grades 7-12 in pooled testing – 50.90%

Percentage of student athletes that have been vaccinated:

- Bath Middle School – 53.45
- Morse High School – 80.71
- Woolwich Central School – 41.67
- Student athletes in grades 7-12 that have been vaccinated – 69.37%

Superintendent Manuel reported that a brief survey concerning pooled testing and masking was distributed to 140 student athletes with 113 students submitting a response.

Morse Athletic Director Nate Priest shared the three questions included in the survey and the results of the survey.

1. Are you currently signed up for pooled testing? 48.7% or 55 students responded “Yes” and 51.3% or 58 students responded “No”.
2. If you are not signed up for pooled testing, would you be willing to do so if it meant that masks were optional during competition? 54.9% or 62 students responded “Yes”, 6.2% or 7 students responded “No” and 38.9% or 44 students responded “N/A”.
3. Do you have any concerns if masks were optional during athletic competitions? 81.4% or 92 students responded “No” and 18.6% or 21 students responded “Yes”.

Dr. Hanna stated that she would not recommend having our student athletes unmasked at this time due to the increase in Covid cases in Maine. Dr. Hanna reported that our goal is to keep our kids and staff healthy as we move through the current surge and prepare for the next new variant. Dr. Hanna felt that RSU 1 has been very proactive about having the vaccine available for students and it is important to look at the vaccination rates of the teams that we are playing. In general masks do help to decrease the risk of Covid transmission and we all want our kids to stay in school and be able to play sports. The goal of a mask is to reduce transmission so we can have a winter sports season, keep our schools open, and help to keep our students, families and staff safe. The virus can attach to any mucous membrane such as your eyes. There are athletic masks that have a wire nose piece that can be used to help the mask from slipping. Dr. Hanna reported that studies have shown that cloth and surgical masks remain protective even when wet and now is not the time to relax the safety protocols with the rates increasing so substantially in our state.

Board member Dorr shared her experience at Friday night’s basketball game when our competitors were not respecting our masking policy and it was so loud in the gymnasium that coaches and players needed to pull down their mask in order to communicate with one another. Ms. Dorr felt that the exposure Friday night was pretty significant and wondered if we are as protected as we think we are and could we be more protected if our athletes were in pooled testing.

Dr. Hanna was also in attendance during Friday’s basketball game and felt that our players did a great job at keeping their masks on appropriately but was shocked at the behavior of the opposing team.

Mr. Priest reported that he does communicate ahead of time with the school district that our team is scheduled to play to let them know of our protocols. Officials are in charge of what happens on the floor of a basketball game and are treating masking the same way as a uniform violation. The player will receive a warning from the official and then is sent to the bench. Mr. Priest stated that he has a conversation with the officials prior to each game to make them aware of our masking protocol and expectations.

The discussion regarding winter athletic protocols also included a conversation on universal pooled testing for all athletes in exchange of masking.

Dr. Hanna reported that the CDC has done many studies to look at the safety of masks while exercising and has identified certain times when masks should not be worn. Some of the sports include gymnastics, cheering when the athletes are flying, and swimming. As far as wrestling is concerned, the CDC determined that masks can be worn during a wrestling meet as long as an official or coach is monitoring the match in order to make that the mask is not becoming a danger.

In discussing the idea of limit the number of spectators in order to reduce the noise level in the gymnasium, Mr. Priest responded that the first couple of games were very successful but the stands during Friday's game were full.

When asked if playing a competitive sport is any more dangerous in transmission than some students just hanging out together, Dr. Hanna responded that there is a risk associated with sports because it expands cohorts which increases possible exposure to the virus.

Chairperson August asked Mr. Priest to see if he can secure some athletic masks for our student athletes and have them available for our sports teams.

EXTEND THE MEETING PAST THE TWO-HOUR LIMIT

MOTION: Ensel

SECOND: Dorr

VOTE: Board (7-0)
Student (1-0)

TO: Extend the meeting past the two-hour limit.

REVISIT WINTER ATHLETICS PROTOCOLS

Superintendent Manuel stated that masking isn't perfect but it is a layer of protection. Our students are doing a good job at wearing them and occasionally need a reminder to pull their mask up over their nose. Dr. Manuel was also surprised at the results of the survey in that around 20 student athletes expressed their concern regarding their own health and safety if we make masking optional. These students stated that they would still wear their mask even if our masking protocol changed.

Chairperson August stated that we can ask Mr. Priest to contact other districts to see what they are doing regarding pooled testing. Mr. August also asked Mr. Priest to reach out to the Maine Principals' Association to see what their reaction has been over the short period of time that schools have been in competition and if they have any other guidance that they may offer to school districts.

MOTION: Perkins

SECOND: Ritch-Smith

VOTE: Board (5-2)
Students (1-0)

TO: Maintain our current masking protocol for our athletes and ask Mr. Priest to gather more information from other schools and districts to bring back to the January Board meeting as well as a report of his experiences with spectators and athletes.

PERSONNEL ITEMS

Superintendent Manuel reported the following retirements effective at the end of the 2021-2022 school year:

- Andrea DiBenedetto, Social Workers, Morse High School
- Kevin O'Leary, English teacher, Morse High School
- Lisa Gastonguay, Special Education teacher, Phippsburg School
- Sue Morlock, Ed Tech, Dike-Newell School

BRIGHTSPACE

Technology Director Dean Emmerson presented the Board with an update on how Brightspace is being used in the classroom. A copy of the presentation will be included with the official Board minutes.

FIRST READING OF BOARD POLICIES

The following policies were presented for a first reading without any concerns or comments:

- CBI – Evaluation of the Superintendent
- IHBAC – Child Find Policy

NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION

- Regular Board meeting will be held on Monday, January 24, 2022 at Morse High School - 6:00 pm

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION: Perkins

SECOND: Ensel

VOTE: Board (7-0)
Students (1-0)

TO: Enter into executive session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(C) to discuss disposition of property at 8:45 pm.

RETURN TO GENERAL SESSION

The Board returned to general session at 9:58 pm.

ADJOURN

MOTION: Perkins

SECOND: Ryan

VOTE: Board (7-0)

TO: Adjourn at 9:59 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Patrick M. Manuel, Ed.D.
Secretary