

Special Meeting, Public Forum (Tuesday, August 18, 2020)
Delaware Academy Central School District at Delhi
High School Auditorium
In-Person and Virtual Meeting

MINUTES

Members Present: Elizabeth Huneke, Tammy Neumann, Seth Haight, Lucy Kelly, Sean Leddy, Kimberly Shephard, and James Tucker Jr. (attended virtually).

Others Present: Kelly Zimmerman, Superintendent, Carey Shultz, Business Administrator, Julie Mable, Elementary Principal, Robin Robbins, MS/HS Principal, Luke Potrzeba, Technology Supervisor, William Petrilli, CSE Coordinator, Christine Miller, Food Service Supervisor, Susan Temple, District Clerk.

Open the Meeting:

1. Call to Order:

President, Elizabeth Huneke called the Special Meeting of the Board of Education of the Delaware Academy Central School District at Delhi to order at 5:38 p.m.

Presentation:

Reopening Plan, Administrative Team:

Mrs. Kelly Zimmerman and the Administrative Team presented the Reopening Plan for the 2020-2021 school year.

Public Comments:

President, Elizabeth Huneke opened the floor to questions or comments from the public. Mrs. Zimmerman answered questions from the community members that

Q: What is the length of school day?

A: All day. We are shifting the time forward by 10 – 15 minutes because we cannot have kids congregating in areas. We are pushing the bus arrival times to be a little tighter to the start time in school so that our students enter the building in a controlled fashion and either they eat breakfast with us here at school or a grab-n-go breakfast, and then they report directly to their first period class. We have also implemented a homeroom model this year so all students have a place to report to upon entering school. We need to control all the movement of our students.

Q: Will kids be allowed to play with each other at recess? Will they be able to interact at lunch? What will PE look like?

A: Yes, we are still going to have recess. Of course students will be able to interact with each other, that's why we're here. Students will be taught to social distance, but be able to socialize. Students will be able to remove their masks to eat lunch and may interact with other children as long as they are six feet apart. We don't have a definitive answer for what that will look like. New York State says that for high activity sports that create heavier breathing requires 12-feet of distance for social distancing. For less rigorous activities as long as the students wear masks, they don't need to maintain 12-feet of distance. It is going to require some creative thinking on our physical education teachers. They've already had some really cool ideas for remote learning activities and for kids that are staying at home, but we will continue with PE, it will just look a little different.

Q: How will we account for attendance online?

A: The first way for attendance, is to see who's logging in. Can we guarantee that they are watching the entire time? I can't because I can't force a student to put their face on that screen. However, that should not be the only way we are making contact with our students as well. A teacher may place a phone call to that student that day. We have not had that conversation with our teachers yet. We have to get around to guarantee those pieces. For those parents that have chosen the remote learning model, you've made a certain commitment to us that you are active in knowing your student is participating. We will be developing a home school compact that defines what our expectations are about the remote learners are, including expectations of our families, and of our students, and also what kind of learning you can expect from our teaching staff and administrators in order to support that learning model.

Q: How will you handle a small child who intuitively tries to hug a teacher or hug one another? I don't want my students reprimanded for trying to show love. I understand there are rules for touching, but how will they be enforced?

A: We are not going to yell at our kids for wanting to be human. We will monitor these situations carefully to keep kids safe and to keep this from happening. We fully recognize the issue and will not reprimand students. We will do our best to redirect that. We will address intentional touching from a disciplinary perspective.

Mrs. Zimmerman read a comment that was submitted "You're doing a great job, I'm just trying to decide what is best for my child." She commented she fully recognizes that what's best for one family may not be best for another family. We're working hard to respect all the individual choices and the difficulty in these choices each family has had to make.

Q: How long will elementary students be sitting in their classroom if they're not moving?

A: Specials teachers will be coming to the classroom other than physical education. We see them going to physical education in either the gymnasium or outside, weather permitting. All the elementary teachers do an application on their Smart boards where periodically, they get up and dance and do various moving activities. As long as they are behind their chairs, they are going to be getting up and moving around and dancing. Individual teachers will also be in charge of their recess this year. So whenever

that works in their schedule, or they need a mask break to go outside, the individual teachers can take them to do that. Will they spend a lot of time in their classroom? Yes they will. They are going to do their specials there, they're going to do their ELA and Math there, as well as eating their lunch there, but they will have opportunities to get up and move around and do other things. Cohorts will be kept together.

Trustee, Seth Haight asked Mrs. Mable to talk about any added developments that may have happened since last week.

Mrs. Mable reported there have been developments every day, and they change every day. We're looking at how to expand that capacity as far as we can. At this point, we will not be able to expand that to grades 2 and 3. That is off the table. We are still looking at K and 1 at this point. We're looking at as many subgroups as we can. She commented she really didn't feel she could say more at this time.

Trustee, Lucy Kelly asked about the application. On the application, you said they would stay with their cohorts. Does that mean if there are two classes at one grade level, those classes can intermingle or not?

Mrs. Mable replied probably not. No. It is a large group. It is sad for all of us, especially the kids, but we've been tasked with keeping the groups small.

Mrs. Zimmerman commented the important thing to keep in mind is that this is all temporary. We need to choose parameters to at least start and get us off and get us rolling, and I will always err on the side of caution. Mrs. Mable is right, I have tasked our administrators in developing models where we can control movement wherever possible. Until we get into a situation, and until we hear that our infection rates are remaining low in the county, there are so many variables that we can't control. We can't control for people coming back. I don't know where people have been. All of these pieces, and she takes the responsibility of the safety of our students who are coming back to us very seriously, and if that means not giving the responses that she knows you want to hear, then that's okay. But as we move forward, and we find that we can make those small steps toward "normalcy" we're willing to do that. We will do so with caution and certainly with information to make those decisions on. Mrs. Zimmerman has been pushing the administration to bring back as many students as possible and as recent as two hours ago they were meeting on this issue. We just don't have answers yet.

Q: If I volunteer to transport my children, but a need changes, will I be allowed to get transportation for them to ride on the bus?

A: If an emergency arises, call us. We will see if there is a way we can safely transport them. We will not be able to handle last minutes changes (30 people calling on any given day within the last hour of school to say I need to make a last minute change) because what that could quickly do is overload one particular bus where we are no longer safely transporting your children.

Q: How will we do the daily check in?

A: That will be available on PowerSchool. It is called E-Collect and it is available on your iPhone or Smartphone.

Q: When will supply lists be available?

A: We don't have that yet. You may not receive a supply list until the first week that we are in session because we are not in that stage of planning yet.

Q: When students are choosing remote learning, will they have access to textbooks, etc.?

A: Yes

Q: Will remote learners have the same lessons and work as those in class?

A: Yes, as much as possible we are really trying to mirror our curriculum and instruction, regardless of model.

Q: When will we need to make our final decision for our schooling choice?

A: Please let us know as soon as possible. We have not set a deadline yet, but once we commit to a specific model, then we will need a commitment from our families to let us know now.

Q: How many teachers will ask students to keep their masks on to maximize safety?

A: I don't know. That will be a personal decision of our teachers.

Q: With the plan to alternate remote and in school teaching how are parents expected to continue working? Most employers are not that flexible. Will there be some type of grants or funds that will help these parents with additional daycare costs or wages.

A: No, unfortunately the district will not have any flow through funds coming to the district from the government. We are not in a position to help offset that cost. This is why she has relentlessly pushing for the younger learners to be here every day to try to alleviate some of that. She knows firsthand how hard this is for parents. Mrs. Zimmerman suggested that people please talk to others in the community. In her short time here she has learned that everyone is so supportive and Delhi is truly a special place. The entire community bears this challenge. So, talk to your neighbors, talk to the community and really lean on each other for support. There are parents out there that are willing to support each other.

Q: As the final number of students who want to be on campus is finalized, will there be any consideration for one full-time cohort for grade levels to be on campus? What are the remaining challenges to this model?

A: We've addressed a lot of those questions already in terms of what we've looked at and stretched our capacity.

Q: Creative solutions? How will you involve the community at large?

A: When we had this discussion on Thursday night, we had community members saying "I'll volunteer" or "Let me know how I can help." As much as we would love to have volunteers come into our building to help us out with the manpower, there are a lot of pieces in the state law that prevent us from doing something like that. There are background checks, fingerprinting, and NYS certification. If you would like to substitute, that is a great way to help. We are always looking for substitute teachers. The requirements for a substitute teacher is a 4 year degree. To be a substitute aide, there is no college degree requirement. The state in general, has discouraged having volunteers in schools this school year. We are also open to other creative ideas you may have on how our community can support us.

Q: Will in-person lessons be live-streamed for remote learners?

A: Yes. There will also be a library of lessons available to them.

Q: If we start sports again, will all students in all models be permitted to participate? Will there be transportation available to them?

A: Yes for the participation, but transportation has not been figured out yet.

Q: Will school meals continue to be provided at no cost?

A: We do not have an answer yet. There has been some chatter about paid or free and reduced meals. We hope to have more guidance on this tomorrow or Thursday. We have meetings again tomorrow on this. We will let everyone know when we learn more.

Q: I have concerns about temperature checks being done at home rather than at school by an authorized school official. There is no guarantee that it is being done, or being done accurately at student homes.

A: Mrs. Zimmerman replied she can't guarantee that either, but she has to trust that if parents are sending their child to school that they are upholding their responsibility to take their child's temperature at home and to complete the screening information for us. We talked about if we have the capacity and the ability to temperature check every single child who is coming to our doors. We ran a preliminary time check to see how long that would take, and we came up with 20-30 minutes to do that, and there is not a requirement to do that so at D.A. we are making the choice to have our parents do that at home and then report that to us electronically. That also gives us the need to flag two things; 1) if they didn't do it at all, then we will absolutely do that here, and 2) if they did provide the information to us, that will immediately put up a red flag, and we'll be able to address that before that child walks through the doors. We have invested in thermometers for the school. They use the term in the question "an authorized school official." You do not need a trained person to take temperatures. If a child starts to present symptoms, we have a protocol in place.

Q: Can the DASH program be a primary provider?

A: Yes, DASH can be a primary provider. If a child presents with symptoms, they can be seen by DASH, and then we work in collaboration with the Department of Health if it becomes a confirmed case.

Q: What if it is not COVID? What if my child tests positive for Strep or another differential diagnosis that might look like symptoms of COVID?

A: In that case, if a child has a pediatrician or DASH, or a doctor diagnoses the child with something different, then we follow protocols where the child needs to be fever free for 48 hours and have a doctor's excuse to return to school.

Q: If a child needs to be quarantined for any reason, can they jump in on remote learning?

A: Yes, provisions can be made to perform school work.

Q: Can we change models if we are not comfortable with what we initially chose?

A: We will have 10 week look-back points. Families will have the opportunity to make a request for a change; however, we can't guarantee that we can accommodate the request. We ask that you wait for the 10-week period.

Q: If a student is remote learning and is legitimately home sick, what are the expectations from the teacher going to be?

A: The bottom line is, we'll be reasonable. If a teacher hasn't heard from a student in a few days, a phone call will be made to the parent.

Mrs. Robbins reported the middle/high school already has a protocol ready.

Q: What will the content be in the library bank? Will I hear and see a teacher and peers?

A: There will be a combination of pre-recorded and in-person teaching.

Q: Are there concerns about the ability to access and confidentiality of students being on camera. Concerns about a parent going into a student's home.

A: The New York State Education Department addressed some of those questions. The risk is born by the district. We are protected by a great degree for that platform. If a parent doesn't want their child on camera, we will respect that. We will ensure a student is not on camera if that piece is being live-streamed. It also protects teachers against using pre-recorded lessons. We cannot use pre-recorded lessons as discipline for the teacher.

Mr. Haight would like to encourage teachers on how we interact with others, in that we need to be considerate about a child that may be self-conscious asking questions. Mrs. Zimmerman noted that we need our teachers to create a balance for that. We are still required to assure daily interaction with a certified teacher for the remote model. Standard operating procedures still need to be put in place. We will need to teach social behavior for online learning as well.

Q: When will the final decision be made for grades K-2 in-person learning?

A: Tomorrow.

Q: Can you speak more about the K-2 full time attendance?

A: Our goal was initially K-2, but now realistically, we are talking K-1 in regard to our contractual obligations to our teachers. We will continue to evaluate that to ensure their planning each day.

Q: Will you have orientation for all the students, regardless of what platform of learning they choose to meet their teacher?

A: We haven't gotten that far yet, but yes, we are working on that.

Q: Will families have input on whether they are in cohort A or cohort B?

A: We have already preliminarily set the cohorts up. If you have a significant hardship to the family by our choice, then let us know, and we will try to accommodate you. There is no guarantee that we will be able to honor the request.

Mr. Steve Little thanked Mrs. Zimmerman and the administration for the hard decisions they are making. He has a family of three where you are dealing with over 700 students. Not everyone will be happy with the decisions we are making, but we'll get through it.

Mr. Little asked when the schedules will be available. Mrs. Zimmerman replied soon. We hope to have them out within the next week.

Q: Do you see a problem with the remote learning vs the hybrid learning?

A: We have put structures in place to alleviate the problems. We haven't determined the grading procedures yet. We will ask parents and students to sign off on the expectations and commit to whatever model they choose.

Mr. Little commented that for the parent that works and asked for access to the teacher. There are tons of resources available online for all contents.

Q: Is there any way to bring our first cohort in on Wednesday, and then our second cohort in on Thursday so that I as a teacher can get to see all of my kids I'm going to have for the year, in that first week? Friday can then be used for any last minute staff development to plan and get ready for the first full week?

A: We are looking at that, and we will be putting a schedule together and will be sending something out to parents.

Q: Will we have access to a teacher at night?

A: We will do our best, but we need to remember there are contractual issues to keep in mind, and teachers have lives too.

Q: Do you foresee a problem with the hybrid program?

A: We have protocols in place. We haven't determined the grading process yet for each model. Expectations will be spelled out for students.

A parent commented there are tons of resources out on the internet to help parents and students for all contents. He found it helpful to him with his family.

Q: Why not just make classes normal set up?

A: There are limitations by the number of periods of day a teacher can teach. She won't force one model on anyone.

Q: What if the Governor says we can return to normal?

A: We will re-evaluate at that time.

Q: If a student wants to drop courses, will they be allowed to do so?

A: If possible, yes. There are limits. There is less latitude for students this year. Electives are the only courses a student will be able to drop. All the counselors will meet and will work on it. We need to make sure all required courses are scheduled for completion, especially Regents-based courses.

Q: If families, students, and staff have vacation and will be going out of the state, will they need to quarantine?

A: Mrs. Zimmerman asked that families please don't do that. We need everyone on board. If you are a member of the staff and have plans, please call your principal.

Q: How can I volunteer to provide childcare?

A: Talk to the community. The district cannot affiliate with a daycare nor can we facilitate that.

Q: If students are staying in pods, are they staying in the pods and not transitioning?

A: Pods are already isolated so there will be more movement.

Mrs. Zimmerman turned the floor over to the Board for closing comments.

Trustee, Lucy Kelly clarified for the public, that some teachers will be asked to teach one class out of their certification area. They will not be asked to teach something they are not comfortable with.

Mrs. Kelly thanked the custodial staff for all their hard work.

Trustee, Seth Haight thanked everyone for everything they are doing to make sure our district reopens safely.

Trustee, Tammy Neumann thanked everyone who served on the reopening committee, the students and staff for the group efforts. She commented we as a Board will do what is best for the students.

President, Elizabeth Huneke commented this isn't forever. We're trying so hard to do the best we can. The Board appreciates the community's patience. She put out a special thank you to the school counselors.

There were no further questions, comments, or discussion.

Adjournment:

On a motion made by Seth Haight, seconded by Lucy Kelly, the Board of Education adjourned the Special Meeting at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Temple
District Clerk

