

Re-Entry Committee Virtual Meeting Minutes  
May 26, 2020  
3:30 p.m.

Committee Members:

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue	Anne Uberti	Dr. Frank Purcaro
Ron Bienkowski	Chris Geissler	Dr. Kathy Gombos
Dr. Matt Correia	Dr. Kim Longobucco	Dr. Michellu Ku
John Vouros	Rebekah Harriman-Stites	Tom Kuroski
Marlene Bucci	Erin Ardino	Anne Dalton
: Karen Powell	Mark Pompano	Matt Memoli
Suzanne Hurley	Bob Gerbert	Jack Vichiola
Brett Nichols	Kim Shapiro	Lisa Kilcourse
Donna Culbert	Suzanne D'Eramo	Carmella Amodeo
Michelle Hiscavich	Kristen Bonacci	Allyson Story
Deb Petersen	Sharon Vetrano	Jen Hoag
Kerri Sommer	Alan Colangelo	Tom Pescarmona
Kierstin Raccio	Andrew SanAngelo	Tracy Galassi
Induk Song	Meredith Walsky	Kristin Larson

Dr. Rodrigue opened the meeting at 3:32 p.m. and thanked everyone for being on this important committee. The goal of this organizational meeting is to put together a clear, reasonable and compelling plan for our students and community. This meeting was being recorded.

Michelle Ku is on the Regional Task Force and will speak about that group and Kristin Larson will talk about CARES funding.

Dr. Rodrigue presented the outline of the Re-Entry Committee. This plan will have to account for assumptions that might be necessary when we have State guidance we have to assume that social distancing will be a part of the return with precautionary measures on the bus and in the classroom. The school schedule might be a blend of some type of staggered schedule or some means of being able to return to school without a full capacity of students. There are a lot of things to weigh in on regarding moving forward.

There are six pillars, or themes, in this re-entry plan which include Governance, Wellness, Instruction and Technology, Social and Emotional, Facilities, and School Operations, and looked at the most fundamental pillars to work with our framework. Each pillar has a specific goal and these groups will overlap.

Governance addresses the oversight of actions, accountability, and communication. Wellness looks at actions to ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff including mental health screening and reporting protocols for school staff. Instruction and Technology looks at practices that address academic and technology needs of all learners. Social and Emotional addresses learning, Facilities looks at protocols to make school buildings safe for students and staff, and School Operations looks at logistics that support a safe and organized transition back to school.

Regarding group roles and responsibilities, the group facilitators will be key as they will be guiding the committees. We don't have a lot of time so meetings will be held weekly and finish by the middle of July.

There was a survey which was received Friday and shut down Monday with over 40,000 participants across the state. Most felt it was best to keep schools closed until reliably mitigated. We need to have all safety precautions in place before we bring back staff and

students. We need to know about devices if this goes into the fall. We talked with staff that had issues with their own connectivity and what was difficult for students.

Mrs. Uberti said our survey focuses more on concrete and objective things. It will be collecting more practical data if we have to do a distance learning plan again. We will talk about when to send it out.

Dr. Rodrigue noted that there are regional task forces feeding into the State Task Force. They are informing the Governor and Commissioner of Education.

Mrs. Ku said the big question is what the State guidance will be. She just attended a regional advisory meeting. April 23 the Governor announced forming an advisory team. He will be replacing that group with a consulting group but the Commissioner of Education will continue advising the Governor. Six teams from various RESCS are going to synthesize recommendations regarding the safe return to school and are having weekly conversations.

Each team includes the area RESC director, one parent, one school leader, two superintendents, one Board of Education member, one community or special interest group member, two teachers, a public health official, plus one additional member. Through Exchange, an online tool was used to collect, rate and analyze constituent feedback and concerns. Nearly 40,000 people participated with 50,000 ideas and more than 1,000,000 reactions. The system was overtaxed and shut down within a couple of days. They identified six areas which include supporting the well-being of students, staff and families, to spread mitigation, coordination and communication and collaboration, operations and logistics, potential second wave closing contingency planning, and teaching and learning which includes to mitigate the loss of learning that's taken place. Three models from the State are attending school on alternate days, a half-day program, and individualized training. These are mainly reducing density on the buses and in the buildings. The State sent a draft on how to implement summer school this summer. Regarding busing you could only have  $\frac{1}{4}$  of students on a bus. Another model is a.m. and p.m. classes but there would be a logistical issue with more buses needed. Individualize learning would cut down on transportation costs but they are not sure if that's ideal for students. Most appealing was alternate days.

Dr. Rodrigue asked how we could go on certain schedules when there are parents who work in other towns.

Mrs. Ku said there were other models including alternating blocks of days and the cohort model when only specific grades are in at one time. Although younger students are less vulnerable we still have a question if they can carry it. Also, older students can learn from home more easily. They also looked at the roles played in childcare. Today's team meeting addressed summer school with big issues including transportation costs, mask wearing is a requirement and will likely go into the fall, and the Superintendent's group putting together a regional plan. The State is supposed to get a proposal from the Department of Education.

Kristin Larson spoke about the CARES Act which passed in March and has the largest amount for funding in the bill. It is the most significant source of funding for K-12 education and Newtown will receive \$141,090 from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds. This will also provide funds for technology, back to school activities, and summer school. We would have to outline our plans when applying. Other ways to get funding is through the Governors Relief Fund. We are seeing a lot of flexibility with waivers and also extension of deadlines.

Tracy Galassi, Hawley teacher, asked if the survey was for staff and parents. Mrs. Uberti said the first survey is for certified staff and we will develop one for parents. Mrs. Galassi noted that we really don't know about going back to school and asked if we are organizing the committee on if we are going back to school or not going back to school.

Dr. Rodrigue said it had to be both. At any time in the further we may go back to distance learning. She doesn't think it's possible to go back keeping with distance learning guidelines. With any model we have to be sure we are connecting with students. We don't know how the State will guide us. She has been looking at other areas in town we can use including NYA, the Community Center and will check with the Town Hall. We also have to look at what happens to children when parents have to go back to work especially for grades K-6 and ask how we can help families.

Mr. Vouros said it was important that when we think about possibilities it's key that people not think we cannot afford what we need.

Mrs. Dalton asked the time frame and if we only had eight weeks to put a plan in place.

Dr. Rodrigue said we have to work fast with a weekly meeting schedule and see when the State will give us guidance.

Mr. Bienkowski asked about athletics, sports, and extra-curricular activities.

Mr. Memoli said we are taking our lead from CIAC who is waiting to hear from the Department of Education but no one knows what that's going to look like. We meet weekly with CIAC.

Dr. Rodrigue said we also have to talk about PE and music.

Mr. Bienkowski stated that regarding additional staffing with split sessions, if other districts consider the same thing, where do you get the staff?

Dr. Rodrigue said she referred to other support staff and nursing professionals. We could all be in that same situation and need to be up front about our staffing. We have to do what's best for the students and community.

Mrs. Uberti asked what consideration will be given to staff members who have known health risks and if we would be considering looking at our own staff like the age, or have pre-existing health conditions which prohibit them from working. This needs to be addressed when crafting these plans. Some staff could take the distance learning. She was also worried about substitutes and if the State will look at other options if a teacher is out ill and if they could teach remotely. She was concerned about getting low paid daily subs when needed.

Mrs. Ku said those discussions have happened and they are relaxing certifications. We could have staff dedicated to an on-line learning piece.

Mrs. Galassi said when she spoke to staff about mental health and getting the work done, you have to think about ages 4 to 10 and how they touch each other's products, lunch and at recess and not leaving the classroom for specials. They will be in their classroom all day and we have to look at how that would be for these younger students. What happens if a teacher has to be out 14 days with a substitute? There is so much involved with going back.

Dr. Rodrigue said we have a lot to get through with the vulnerability of our students and staff. We have to look at one thing at a time.

Mrs. Stites said that in thinking about these issues, she feels more comfortable with this committee and that we are a leader in the region with our high school graduation plan being used by other districts.

Jack Vichiola asked if we would be asked what is being done in the cleaning protocol. There is a huge range between elementary and high school cleaning. He offered the members to email any ideas for him in the various schools and he would put together a cleaning protocol.

Dr. Rodrigue said his sub-committee would work on that and bring it to the larger group. We have a plan now and will continue with that for now.

Lisa Kilcourse said that each building will have to be treated the same with cleaning protocols. A message should go out to everyone regarding that.

Dr. Rodrigue stated there would have to be training and oversight and plans being looked at and reviewed. There has to be consistency

Kim Shapiro said we cannot rely on Kindergarten students to follow guidelines such as wearing a mask or distancing themselves. We have to be sure we can mitigate before returning and possibly having to go back to distance learning in the fall. Address things like being afraid of going to school or worried about a friend who has it.

Dr. Rodrigue wasn't sure there was PPE for students. A lot will be our confidence in what we say to students and parents. We have to get them in that mindset which will take time.

Michelle Hiscavich asked about the transition to next year especially those changing buildings and having students we haven't had before. A consideration could be having students stay with teachers for the beginning of the year.

Dr. Rodrigue wanted weekly meetings. The facilitator will send out to members and we will meet the following week. Dr. Rodrigue noted that meetings would be held on Wednesdays. We will be working concurrently with the State.

Mr. Kuroski confirmed that for the next meeting the facilitators will forward a predetermined agenda and focus points to consider.

Dr. Rodrigue said there would be an agenda but some items have to grow out of the group. The first order of business is what areas of focus fit under your group.

Mrs. Ku said it would be helpful to see summer school plans.

Dr. Rodrigue would send the summer school regulations with some being very stringent.

Mrs. Bucci said that regarding substitute teachers, you can also use non-certified paras.

Mr. San Angelo asked what our roles would be in sharing out with our schools.

Dr. Rodrigue said once into your groups we will discuss how to be communicated to staff.

Meeting ended at 5:00 p.m.

Submitted by Kathy June