

Concord School District
Board of Education
Special Board meeting
November 23, 2020

Board members present: Jim Richards, *President*; Barb Higgins, Liza Poinier, Tom Croteau, Pamela Walsh (Danielle Smith, Gina Cannon, David Parker, and Chuck Crush participated remotely)

Administrators present: *Superintendent Kathleen Murphy, Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley, Business Administrator Jack Dunn, CHS Principal Mike Reardon, Director of Physical Education and Sport Steve Mello*

Agenda Item 1. Call to Order

President Jim Richards called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and noted that the meeting constituted a quorum of Board members. As several Board members participated electronically, any votes would be by roll call. He noted that public access to the meeting by telephone was provided, with additional access by other electronic means. The meeting was broadcast contemporaneously on ConcordTV's education channel (Comcast Channel 6 or www.youtube.com/ConcordNHTV). He noted the Board would take public comment in two public comment periods by unmuting phone lines one by one, and encouraged the submission of comments via e-mail at concordinfo@sau8.org.

Barb Higgins discussed the Instructional Committee meeting of November 18, which resulted in a recommendation to continue the winter sports programs. All Board members had also attended the committee meeting.

Superintendent Murphy added that this included co-curricular programs (theater, etc.). She felt that Mr. Mello had provided a comprehensive proposal.

Ms. Higgins referenced a recent letter to the Board from District nurses, stating concerns about the sports program including unavoidable close proximity, activities in closed areas, and one breathing on another. She said she had closely examined the Governor's mask mandate. She spoke about her own gym facility and its careful adherence to the Governor's rules.

About 11 sports programs were impacted by this decision, with approximately 260 students at CHS and about 120 students at RMS planning to participate. There were about 30 students in the theater program at CHS.

Chuck Crush noted that 49 people under age 18 were recently diagnosed with Covid-19 in the state and that infections were going up in the state at an exponential rate. He asked if all the programs were being voted on together.

David Parker commented that safety needed to be the Board's first priority, and that he was concerned about students not having outlets for their mental and physical health. He said

participation was a choice that families would make, understanding they were taking some measure of risk. He wondered if it was his role as a Board member to dictate that choice, and said he would have a problem if the motion were amended to specify which sports or programs would be included.

Liza Poinier commented that with cases on the rise it would be irresponsible to move forward without a full report from the District's consulting physician. She recommended that any motion should include taking competition off the table.

Gina Cannon said she felt winter sports were not particularly safe, but felt more strongly that she was not in a position to decide for other families what they should do. She was not sure about competitions.

Tom Croteau said he felt the District should hire good people and listen to them; the District had, and the Board should listen. He said the students should have the chance to participate in the activities they love, and noted their willingness to do anything asked of them.

Pamela Walsh asked if District nurses had been involved in developing the winter sports plan; whether there had been any update on wrestling and whether masks would be necessary; and about the balance of academic needs versus athletics; for example, in-person participation in science labs was not allowed during remote learning.

Mr. Mello said the nurses were critical but did not have specific roles in developing the plan. Competition would not begin until January 15, although the state had allowed a January 11 start. He noted that wrestling could be less safe with masks, but they hoped for an update.

Mr. Reardon said students with various needs would continue coming into the building, and the administration might bring in another 25 students per commons who were struggling for various reasons. The administration would advocate bringing students in for architecture classes and labs, if possible. He also commented that he, Superintendent Murphy, and Steve Mello were well aware of the stakes. He noted that Board members were considering not having a winter sports program because they were concerned about student safety; the other side of overall student health also included their emotional well-being. If denied safe outlets (with adult supervision, making sure protocols were followed), their emotional health would be at greater risk. He urged the Board to take this into consideration.

Ms. Walsh was supportive of the winter sports and co-curricular programs, and asked that the administration meet with the nurses, who might have input to improve the plan.

Mr. Richards said he appreciated Board members' concerns about competition and the spread of the virus. He also heard students say they would do anything to have a season. He noted the District would be remote through January 14, which would protect other students, and teachers. He suggested that any student choosing to go into sports and compete might be required to stay in remote through the season.

Ms. Higgins said that every sport had a unique and specific set of rules, and from November 30 until the holiday break only training and drills would be allowed. After the holiday break, the District would have two weeks in January fully remote. She suggested the motion could be modified in early January to schedule competition.

Mr. Crush said he was disappointed that nurses were not consulted about the plan. He asked how the administration would notify parents of the risks and benefits of their child participating; whether the District considered testing student athletes or had purchased the approved masks for singing and choral activities.

Mr. Dunn indicated that parents were asked to sign a disclaimer stating they understood the risks of competing in sports.

Superintendent Murphy noted the District had listed on the website the locations where families could get free testing. She said the District itself did not have a testing protocol or infrastructure.

Mr. Reardon stated that he had not heard that special masks for singing were available. He said the largest group in any singing cohort was 20 students, in the choir. They would meet in the auditorium, where they could be separated by 12-20 feet. If masks could be procured, that could make a positive difference.

Superintendent Murphy said she discussed singing with Dr. Noble. He expressed concerns about indoor cheerleading and volleyball. Ms. Cannon said he supported outdoor sports, indoor track (not an option), but not basketball, cheerleading, ice hockey, or wrestling.

Mr. Croteau asked Mr. Mello whether having sports begin but no competition until another vote in January was possible or probable.

Superintendent Murphy said Dr. Noble, like Dr. Chan, noted that these decisions were to be left up to individual school boards. She recently received several flyers from various organizations from Seacoast United, AAU and others, and was not sure they had the same strict protocols as District staff. She said students would go elsewhere to play their sport, but that that CSD had put into place good safety measures to keep students safe. She said CHS athletes did not leave the state to compete, but competed regionally.

Mr. Mello noted that while nothing was perfectly safe, this was safer. They were taking a very cautious approach.

Mr. Parker said the need for an amendment to the motion was unnecessary. He said the Board was responsible as it could be, making meetings public, and calling special Board meetings to deal with urgent question of the moment. He stated that the District would do the right thing should activities become problematic.

Public comment

Those community members making public comment included Concord resident and parent Marti Pegnam, whose son is on the hockey team and who is president of the hockey booster club; Concord resident, parent and pediatrician Patty Sargent, parent of triplet boys on the wrestling team; CHS teacher and wrestling coach Ham Munnell; CHS student Jack Sargent, co-captain of the CHS wrestling team; Concord resident and parent Tom Philbrick, whose son is on the hockey team; Concord resident and CHS parent Dawn White, whose senior and sophomore students are on the basketball team; CHS junior Hunter Jeffers, a wrestling team member; CHS senior Jessica White, a basketball team member; CHS student Peter Sargent, co-captain of the wrestling team; volunteer assistant wrestling coach Troy Colby; Concord

resident John True, parent of twins on the hockey team and president of a local hockey club (and whose wife is an ICU nurse and advisor to the hockey booster club); Concord resident and parent and RMS nurse Erin Stewart; and Concord resident and parent Angela Nelson.

Mr. Croteau made a motion to approve the playing of all winter sports and all co-curricular activities for the 2021-2022 competitive season with the full understanding that the season for one or more sports could be cancelled for any Covid-19-related reasons. Ms. Higgins seconded the motion.

Mr. Reardon said clubs and organizations were just as important as sports and should be included. Ms. Poinier said labs and architecture classes should be opened as well. Ms. Walsh said she would like to see students in school for science labs. She referenced the American Academy of Pediatrics youth sports guidelines, stating that students were being more responsible about the pandemic than adults were. She felt students should not be made to decide between sports and hybrid learning.

Mr. Croteau said whether to open science labs or architecture classes should be taken up at a separate session, preferring to limit his motion to co-curricular programs and winter sports.

Superintendent Murphy reminded the Board that the District moved to remote for CHS and RMS because of operational, not safety, reasons.

Ms. Poinier suggested that the administration consult with Dr. Noble about a possible testing regimen for student athletes and CRTC students attending schools in hybrid.

Mr. Richards thanked the students who commented and provided support for their programs, and said he felt they were committed to follow all the protocols. He said he would like to see detailed protocols for the other clubs.

The Board voted by roll call 8-1 (Jim Richards, David Parker, Danielle Smith, Tom Croteau, Gina Cannon, Chuck Crush, Pamela Walsh, and Barb Higgins voted aye; Liza Poinier nay) to approve the playing of all winter sports and all co-curricular activities for the 2021-2022 competitive season with the full understanding that the season for one or more sports could be cancelled for any Covid-19-related reason (motioned by Mr. Croteau, seconded by Ms. Higgins).

Mr. Crush made a motion to direct the administration to investigate testing and protocols associated with testing involving these sports. Ms. Cannon seconded the motion. Mr. Croteau asked if this was clear and do-able. Superintendent Murphy said she could speak with Dr. Noble about this. She reiterated that families could get these tests at no cost at a variety of locations. Mr. Crush said his motion was not to implement testing.

The Board voted 9-0 (Gina Cannon, Tom Croteau, Chuck Crush, Barb Higgins, David Parker, Liza Poinier, Jim Richards, Danielle Smith, Pamela Walsh voted aye) to direct the administration to investigate testing and protocols associated with testing involving athletics (motioned by Mr. Crush, seconded by Ms. Cannon).

Jim Richards made a motion to move into non-public session at 7:53 p.m. under RSA 91-A:3 II (c) that states, in part: "... Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person ..."

The Board voted 9-0 (Gina Cannon, Tom Croteau, Chuck Crush, Barb Higgins, David Parker, Liza Poinier, Jim Richards, Danielle Smith, Pamela Walsh voted aye) to move into non-public session at 7:53 p.m. under RSA 91-A:3 II (c) that states, in part: "... Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person ..." (motioned by Mr. Richards, seconded by Ms. Higgins).

The Board recessed into non-public session. The Board came out of non-public session at 8:20 p.m. Mr. Croteau made a motion to seal the minutes of the non-public session under RSA 91-A:3 II (c) - public employee.

The Board came out of non-public session and voted 9-0 (Gina Cannon, Tom Croteau, Chuck Crush, Barb Higgins, David Parker, Liza Poinier, Jim Richards, Danielle Smith, Pamela Walsh voted aye) to seal the minutes under RSA 91-A:3 II (c) - public employee because not to do so would invalidate the reason for having moved into non-public session (motioned by Mr. Richards, seconded by Mr. Croteau).

Mr. Crush made a motion to adjourn.

The Board voted 9-0 to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Crush, seconded by Ms. Walsh).

The Board adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, *Secretary*
Linden Jackett, *Recorder*