

**Sebago School Department
Regular School Committee Meeting
August 24, 2021**

There was a Regular Meeting of the Sebago School Committee on Tuesday, August 24, 2021 in the Cafeteria of Sebago Elementary School at 6:30 p.m.

Call to Order and Roll Call

The following School Committee members were present – Donelle Allen, Chair, Justin Fariel, Joe McMahon, Wendy Newcomb, and Tina Vanasse. Also present were Superintendent David Galin, Secretary Allen Crabtree, Randa Viitala, Chris Balchunas, Maggie Williams, Joe Williams, Karen Frechette, Mary MacKenna, Randee Cassidy, Doug Horne, Erica Anderson, Cassie Winslow, Norman Sinotte, Jock MacGregor, Anne Milliken, Claudia Lowe, Helen Twombly. Heather Adams, Krys Carriere, Charles Freer, Charlie Frechette.

The meeting was called to order by Donelle Allen, Chair, at 6:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance

Adjustments to Agenda

There were none.

Minutes

A motion was made by Tina Vanasse, seconded by Joe McMahon, to approve the minutes for the School Committee meeting of July 27, 2021. Vote Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried.

Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were none.

Presentations/Reports

There were none.

Principal's Report

- Pre-k and kindergarten orientation is this Friday, 8/27 - details will be posted on the school web site
- Open House is Monday, 8/30 from 5:30 - 6:30. We hope to see all of our students and families

- The first day of school for students is Wednesday, September 1. Our Pre-k and K students have been assigned to group A or Group B and will only attend one of the first 2 days (9/1 and 9/2). Letters have been sent with that information.
- Liz Connell will be our one day a week building-based sub to provide consistent classroom coverage
- Enrollments

Pre-k - 14
 K - 19
 1 - 16
 2 - 18
 3 - 16
 4 - 14
 5 - 18
 Resource Room - 3
 Total - 118

Superintendent's Report

- Staffing - in the hiring process for .5 Sp Ed teacher and ed tech, bus driver, substitutes
- The district's application for American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND (ARP ESSER) will be posted on the district web site for public comment next week.
- Our water treatment plan was approved by the state and we will be having the filtration system installed on Friday. This should address the issue with copper levels in our water.

Chairwoman's Report

- Chair Donelle Allen laid out the rules for comments from the public on agenda items.

Action Items

- Family Handbook

The Family Handbook was discussed. Donelle Allen suggested replacing the term "compliance" with "cooperation" in regard to behavior.

A motion was made by Joe McMahon, seconded by Wendy Newcomb, to approve the Family Handbook as amended. Vote: Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried.

- Personnel

Nomination of Haloye Johnson as a part-time (.20) Music Teacher for the 2021-22 school year)

Appointment of Willow Timothy as a Special Education Technician II (paid with grant money)

Appointment of Tia Banks as a Cook for the 2021-22 school year

A motion was made by Wendy Newcomb, seconded by Justin Fariel, to approve all three appointments. Vote: Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried.

- Policies – First Reading

Remote Participation in School Board Meetings, File Code BED

A motion was made by Joe McMahon, seconded by Tina Vanasse, to approve the first reading of the above policy. Vote: Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried.

- Policies – Second Reading

Video Surveillance on School Property, File Code ECA

Earned Paid Leave, File Code GBP

Earned Paid Leave Administrative Procedure, File Code GBP-R

A motion was made by Joe McMahon, seconded by Wendy Newcomb, to approve the second reading of the above policies. Vote: Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried.

- Elect Delegate and Alternate for the Delegate Assembly of there Maine School Board Association

There was no interest and no School Committee members were advanced to the Delegate Assembly.

- Reopening Plan

There was a great deal of discussion by the audience on the draft reopening plan for SES, primarily over the requirement for all students, teachers, and staff to wear masks while in the building.

Chris Balchunas, School Nurse, spoke in favor of requiring masks. Under the Maine State of Emergency it was mandated, but now that the State of Emergency does not exist mask wearing is strongly recommended. She quoted statistics that showed Maine in the top three states in the US for children testing positive for COVID which emphasizes the need for preventative measures for our students while in school. She also recommends that SES adopt a school COVID testing program.

Heather Adams recommends students, teachers and staff all wear masks in school. She pointed out that other schools in our area all require masks.

Chris Carrier recommends masks in SES as a way to help keep families and children safe.

Charles Frechette said that masks should be up to parents to decide. There are long-term health effects from wearing masks, and children's immune system defenses will not develop if masks are worn all day. We need to recognize the negative social impact to children forced to wear masks all day. Where is the science that mask wearing helps reduce the transmission of COVID? The threat of catching COVID is less than catching the flu, and we don't require mask wearing to prevent the flu.

Karen Frechette said that there are very low results of the benefits of mask wearing to prevent infections, and COVID is less of a threat than the common flu. Mask wearing reduces learning – children can't laugh or show emotions through a mask, and mask wearing increases anxiety and depression in children. Adults shouldn't put their own needs ahead of those of children. Improved ventilation is a better solution than wearing masks, and other options to mask wearing should be considered. Parents should make the decisions for their children.

Charles Frechette quoted results of COVID infections. The instances of pre-K to 12th grade cases in Maine are fewer than the sightings of Big Foot and Elvis. August 10 figures show only 50 cases state-wide of people under 25 years old in hospital, and these include COVID cases plus all other illnesses. Of these only 5 cases are COVID in Maine. All this talk about masks and the potential for infections is fear mongering – no more than “chicken little – the sky is falling” there is no threat from COVID. CDC says there is no threat from COVID. The risk in Sebago is very low. Teachers should show proof of vaccination and should wear masks all the time, but students shouldn't. Wearing a mask is toxic to children, like a sponge stuck to their face.

Joe (Hugh) Williams said that parents should make the choice on whether their child should wear a mask. The Sebago School Board cannot require that children wear masks in school, only make recommendations. CDC says that COVID has no effect on children – there is no risk to children contracting COVID. Any action by the Sebago School Board should be based on what the parents of our children wish – the School Board works for the town and the parents. The Reopening Committee voted 6 to 2 at their August 5 committee meeting.

Claudia Lowe asked if children can come to the library on field trips under the reopening plan. The library requires masks. She believes that masks should be worn by students, teachers and staff when in SES and is concerned over the rapidly growing number of COVID cases with the Delta variant. She urges the School Board to do the right thing and require masks.

Helen Twombly, Sebago Health officer, reinforced that masks have been shown conclusively to prevent the spread of air-borne infections such as COVID. The CDC has strongly recommended that everyone, whether vaccinated or not, wear masks when inside buildings. Several people in Sebago have contracted COVID. Those who espouse that mask wearing is a parental decision should remember that mask wearing is intended not just to protect your child but all the other children they are in contact with as well as parents and others at their home. Not wearing a mask puts the health of the community at risk.

Donelle Allen was asked about the on-line survey results. She said that the survey did not filter out responses from out-of-state commenters and was not valid.

A comments from the public asked about whether children would have to wear masks during lunch, and what distances would be made between desks and at lunch time.

Another comment said that we can't compare COVID to small pox, mumps, chicken pox and other childhood diseases. COVID is no worse than the flu.

Another comment from a mother who was very concerned with mask wearing. All her family contracted COVID and all are fine. COVID is highly overrated and is not a threat.

Donelle Allen said that she would entertain a motion to accept the Reopening Plan for purposes of discussion.

A motion was made by Tina Vanasse, seconded by Joe McMahon, to approve the Reopening Plan for discussion. Vote: Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried.

The Reopening Plan had these salient points:

- Sebago Elementary School will open for the 2021-2022 school year on September 1, 2021
- There will be no remote learning this school year.
 - Superintendent Galin said that there is no funding for a remote teacher this year, but that this decision can be modified if there is a 75% quarantine of students, teachers and/or staff. A remote learning plan would then be developed.
- The system of health check tickets used last year will be used again this school year.
- Mask wearing by students, teachers and staff will be required indoors
 - Tina Vanasse recommended that masks should be required indoors. The concept of parental choice is void if it affects the health of others. We need to rely on the science about how COVID is spread and the threat that it has over our school and our community. All last year students, teachers and staff all wore masks and we had no COVID transmission and mask wearing did not affect student learning. We should err on the side of caution and require masks.
 - Wendy Newcomb said that as many children as adults are getting COVID with the new Delta variant, and we should not take chances with our students especially since they cannot get the vaccine under age 12. Last year the students did fine with masks, and mask wearing is small price for helping keep everyone safe.
 - Joe McMahon said that we learned last year that mask wearing works, and we should follow and believe the science. Masks are some the best tools we have until younger children can be vaccinated.
 - Justin Fariel recommends masks.
 - Donelle Allen said that parents should make the decision on masks from their children and wants to look at the mask policy every two weeks to see if they are still needed. She recommended scheduling a workshop and School Board meeting every two weeks to discuss.
 - Chris Balchunas said that a two week review would not be possible as health data is not available on that short a turn around.
 - Joe McMahon said that a review of the mask requirement should only reasonably be made if there are changes in the guidelines from the CDC and or the American Pediatric Association – only then should the School Board consider changes to the mask requirement. He suggested amending the Reopening Plan to add a sentence at the end “The School Committee will review the Reopening Plan on a monthly basis and may possibly revise and approve it at that time.”
 - Donelle Allen said that when the Delta variant dies down we can remove the mask requirement.

- Movement by students and teachers among classrooms will be allowed, as it was before COVID
- Physical distancing of student desks in classrooms and common areas will be maintained the extent possible.
- Field trips will begin again, with appropriate safeguards.
- Visitors and volunteers will be allowed in the SES building, with masks.
- Remote IEPs will be allowed with agreement by all participants.
- School will continue to use hand washings and sanitation protocols.
- Vaccination for all staff and students who are eligible is encouraged. Staff vaccination data will be collected monthly.
- Contract tracing will continue if a student or staff member contracts COVID.
- Schoolwide Pool Testing will be implemented.
- Masks will be worn by all bus drivers and passengers.

A motion was made by Joe McMahon, seconded by Tina Vanasse, to approve the Reopening Plan including the requirement that masks be worn in the building, with the addition of a sentence at the end “The Reopening Plan will be reviewed, and potentially revised and approved on a regular basis.” Vote to approve the amended plan was: Yes-4, No-1. Motion carried with Donelle Allen voting No.

Discussion Items

There were none.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Several members of the public were upset at the manner in which discussion and action on the Reopening Plan was done, and didn’t feel that a full opportunity for public input was made before the School Committee made a decision on the Plan.

The following questions were raised which had a bearing on the Plan:

- What will the spacing between desks be? Will it be six feet or something else?
- What about children eating lunch at the cafeteria tables where they will be seated four to a table, much closer than a six foot spacing.
- Chris Balchunas explained pool testing and how it can help identify early infections.
- Tina Vanasse disputed the concept that mask wearing has a profound emotional impact on children.
- Joe McMahon said that masks would not be required out of doors, the same practice used last school year.
- Charles Frechette said we should get the best masks for our children.

Information Items

- MSBA Proposed Resolutions Packets were distributed.
- School Committee Workshop – September 28, 5:30 p.m., SES conference room
- School Committee meeting – September 28, 6:30 p.m., SES library.
- The MSMA Fall Conference will be held October 28 – 29, 2021

Adjournment

A motion was made by Wendy Newcomb, seconded by Joe McMahon, to adjourn. Vote: Yes-5, No-0. Motion carried..

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Secretary

Date Approved