Danbury City-Wide PTO Council

Meeting Minutes (Proposed)

Monday,September 14, 2020

6:00pm

Danbury PAL Parking Lot

Attendance: Tim Maroney (President), Jade O’Connell (Vice President/AIS), Paul Salvatore (Treasurer), Kathy Snow (Secretary), Kevin Walston (Ass’t Superintendent DPS), Genene Morehouse (DHS), Dana O’Rourke (DHS), Michelle Walsh (Broadview), Christine Sweeney (Rogers Park), Chrissy Maruffi (Pembroke/WSMSA), Lisa Ruffles (King Street), Christine Fournier (Mill Ridge), Estela Camacho (Morris Street), Sharon Almafitano (Shelter Rock), Amy Hutchins (South Street), Melissa Fox (Stadley Rough), Rachel Chaleski (BoE liaison), Kate Conetta (BoE liaison)

Call to Order

* The meeting was called to order by Tim Maroney at 6:08pm.

Welcome, Introductions and Updates

* Tim welcomed attendees, meeting was held outdoors and limited to school representatives/PTO due to Covid restrictions.
* Advised that the City-wide Board had met with Kevin Walston and Anne Mead on Friday and presented questions representatives had gathered from their schools. Kevin, Anne and others answered questions and provided a hand-out with those answers. This will be shared electronically and forwarded to City-wide Reps.
* Conducted introductions.
* Tim talked about how we would like to see PTO’s as more of parent educators/resources and not just fundraising groups.

Treasurer’s Report

* Current balance in checkbook is $502.48

Assistant Superintendent’s Report (Kevin)

* Hard copy of powerpoint presentation handed out (will be shared electronically)
* Models for Learning during pandemic - these were the 3 scenarios that every school district in the State had to submit to the Governor over the summer. These were the options required to be submitted to the State to be able to open schools in the Fall:
  + In-Person Learning - **every** student is in school 5 days a week with classroom learning & instructional activities adjusted to provide the safest environment. As an alternative to returning to school, a cohort Distance Learning Option was offered as well. This was the goal of the State, for all schools to be back as In-Person Learning.
  + Hybrid Model - **every** student is 2 days a week in person, 3 days a week Distance Learning or Full Distance Learning.
  + Distance Learning - **every** student is engaged in Distance Learning with materials & support from the school, this is a blend of synchronous & asynchronous learning.
* As Danbury has a very large district, Danbury petitioned the State to begin the school year in the Hybrid model (half the student population physically in the buildings two times per week). Danbury teachers being trained in Digital/Blended Learning strategies).
  + **The State approved this request, so the In-Person Learning Option is no longer an option for Danbury and the Hybrid Model will be the maximum students will be in the school buildings (2 times per week) for the 2020- 2021 school year.**
* In August 2020 as cases of Covid increased in Danbury, the decision was made to begin the school year in the Full Distance Learning of the Hybrid model (described above) and will be re-visited by the Board of Education in early October to see whether students can go to school under the In-Person Learning (described below), 2 days a week in person while maintaining digital/blended connections.
* The Program Options for Danbury for school, now that Hybrid has been approved as the maximum Danbury students will be in school. Parents/Guardians were surveyed and asked to choose an option:
  + In-Person Learning - every student in school 2 days a week with classroom learning & instructional activities adjusted to provide the safest environment (half the student population physically in the buildings). Maintain Digital/Blended connections.
  + Distance Learning - PreK to grade 5 would be full-time remote learning from home. A Danbury Public School teacher would be assigned to deliver/instruct students. Grades 6 through 12 students would be assigned digital courses using a computer based platform. Students would work *independently in self-paced learning that mirrors* their current schedule as closely as possible. A Danbury Public School teacher would be trained to oversee and conduct small groups & lead social emotional activities.
  + Home Schooling - has always an option for families. If a family decides to homeschool, the child will be formally withdrawn from Danbury Public Schools and the parent chooses all instructional materials and is solely responsible for their student’s learning.
* Community transmission of Covid 19 in Danbury will impact the District’s planning, operations and school instruction. Guidance from the State is:
  + Risk level: LOW. Less than 10 Covid-19 cases per 100,000 population per day (over a 7-day average)
  + Risk level: Moderate. 10 to less than 25 Covid-19 cases per 100,000 population per day (over a 7-day average)
  + Risk level: HIGH. More than 25 Covid-19 cases per 100,000 population per day (over a 7-day average)
  + The Board of Education is meeting weekly with Danbury Public School’s Health & Nursing Services Coordinator, Doctors, and other Health Officials to review Covid transmission cases.

General Discussion

* Parents acknowledged the hard work the Administration, teachers, Board of Education and various teams have done during this trying time and truly appreciate everything. Continued communication is key while remaining flexible. Everyone’s goal is to get back into school.
* State of Connecticut has identified 3 areas of focus for schools:
  + Student engagement
  + Parent engagement
  + Social emotional support
* Reviewed if a case of Covid is identified, it will be looked at (depending on where it was found) by many factors such as bus, class, grade, floor, building, school, district. The entire district will not shut down if a case of Covid is found in one school. For example one class in one school may be asked to stay home if a case of Covid is identified while contact tracing is being reviewed. Or it could be an entire grade or school is asked to stay home. If it ends up being traced to a very large population the entire district may need to go back to Distance Learning.
* Re-confirmed that Hybrid is the maximum students would be in school this year and potentially into the 2021-2022 school year. At this time, students will not be back in school 5 days a week until a vaccine is available or the pandemic is declared ‘over’ / government regulations change.
* Comment was made that the language translations of Board of Education meetings needed improvement. Translation of what was being said was not always accurate. Idea was to have meetings transcribed and then translated into other languages for better accuracy.
* A lot of discussion regarding start and end time of high school classes. Why are students beginning at 8:00am and ending at 11:30am? Students are basically in school 4 days a week for 3 hours a day!!
* High School Flex was discussed. Flex is from 12:00 - 12:55 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday as well as from 8:00am - 9:25am and again from 10:00 - 11:25am on Wednesday. That’s almost 7 hours a week!! This is very concerning to parents as students who do not need extra help or need the “flex” time are basically in school 12 hours a week versus a full week from 7:20am - 2:00pm (which included lunch). Currently students are in “class” less than 50% of the time they should be.
* Screen time was talked about and parents asked the Board of Education re-visit the decision of a shorter school day by grade level.
  + Parents agreed grades K through 5 need to have a shorter amount of screen time.
  + The request is to have students in Grades 6 - 12 engaged in distance learning for a normal school day. As many know, teenagers log off school and most log back on to devices for social media, video games, etc.
  + Parents are very concerned teachers will not have enough teaching time with students to get through the curriculum and students will not be prepared for SAT exams, AP exams and will not be ready for college or competitive with their peers
  + It was noted in other districts, middle and high school students are on distance learning for a full day.
  + This seemed to be the largest area of concern for the parents at this point – many questions, concerns and real discussion over the lack of in-school time for students.
* Concern over STAR testing and how results would be interpreted. How will students identified as needing additional help be contacted and how will that help be given? Conversely, how will students identified as needing more of a challenge be addressed?
* It was asked that the Board of Education identify all participants on the Board of Education meetings (not viewers on YouTube). After roll call of BoE members, name the other people on the call.
* Representatives were reminded that the Public School website is a valuable source of information and to tell folks to please use it and search it for information as it is updated and has a section on Q & A.

Updates from School Representatives:

* Most schools have not had a PTO meeting yet. Asked about protocol around holding meetings. Parents/visitors are not allowed in any school building so meetings cannot be held at schools. Weather permitting they can be held outside, socially distanced. Holding meetings over zoom seemed the most ideal option.

**DHS:** is trying to put together a meeting, waiting on administration to be able to attend.

**King Street:** had a meeting on Sept. 4th with more than 50 people on zoom. Also held a virtual book fair over the summer.

Next Meeting

* October 5th via zoom, details to follow.

Adjournment

* The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30pm