

**KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Special meeting of Wednesday, July 29, 2020  
6 P.M.  
Borough Assembly Chambers**

**CALL TO ORDER; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE; ROLL CALL**

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough Board of Education met in special session on the 29th day of July, 2020, at the Ketchikan Gateway Borough Assembly Chambers. Board President Bridget Mattson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

The following members were present to establish a quorum and due notice had been published: Board President Bridget Mattson; Vice President Sonya Skan; Clerk-Treasurer Diane Gubatayao; Board Members Leslie Becker, Jordan Tabb, and Paul Robbins Jr. Board Member Thomas Heutte participated telephonically.

**Board President Statement**

Before opening the public comment period, Board President Bridget Mattson apologized if her conduct at the July 27 town hall meeting had been viewed as disrespectful. She briefly explained guidelines for public comment.

**CITIZEN REMARKS**

Tiffany Cook said there had been a lack of communication and parental involvement throughout the planning for the upcoming school year. Now, parents are hearing about building administrator changes, without being notified, and this leads to speculation and more anger, she said. Ms. Cook also criticized the superintendent's leadership and communication.

Ali Ginter commented on portions of the district's mission statement and belief statements as not being followed. For example, she questioned how "meaningful connections" could be made if parents didn't know who their building administrators would be. She asked how the administrative changes were in the best interest of students, and questioned the moves during an uncertain time.

Sharyl Yeisley said it would be helpful to know if and how the various school risk levels (low, medium, high) would be triggered by active virus case levels in the community. She asked the Board to reconsider voting on this school plan and including parents and community members in its development. Ms. Yeisley questioned how funding to the school district related to the pandemic was used. She said there was a lack of communication and parental involvement regarding the school start; and commented that a petition of no confidence in the superintendent was circulating.

Ketchikan High School teacher Rebecca Bowlen stated appreciation for the work of the district school planning teams. She said she understands parents' frustration, and that everyone is exhausted and frustrated. Ms. Bowlen encouraged the Board to approve the Smart Start plan, stating it is not perfect, but is needed for teachers to move forward. She concluded by asking the Ketchikan community to pull together for its kids.

Shelby Reese spoke about her concerns with various aspects of the Smart Start plan, and cited information from the CDC regarding the COVID's effect on children. Ketchikan is on the low end for active cases and that should guide the school plans, she said. She called for allowing children back in school for 5 days a week with their teachers; and for only resorting to the 50% level Smart Start plan as a contingency. Ms. Reese questioned whether CARES Act funds were being used for COVID-related expenses. She also commented on student assessment scores being low, stating that less school time was asinine.

Nicole Anderson expressed her objection to using paraprofessionals to educate students instead of highly qualified teachers. The current Smart Start plan has 50 percent or more of Ketchikan children's education in the hands of paraprofessionals at an annex site, she stated. Ms. Anderson cited statistics about Ketchikan's COVID cases, stating that this community is unique and indicating its school reopening plan should reflect that. She also referred to CDC recommendations for opening schools. She concluded by stating that Ketchikan should do better than the low risk plan.

Teacher Gara Cesefski shared results of a survey of Ketchikan Education Association members regarding school plans. The 223 respondents were from the various bargaining units: certified; paras, cooks, and custodians; administrative assistants; and school psychologists, and the speech/language pathologists. The results had been shared with School Board members already, she said. Survey questions ranged from familiarity with the most updated school plan to gauging reaction to implementing safety measures, such as masks, and social distancing.

Matthew Merrill said that as the spouse of a teacher and the father of two school-aged children, he sees “both worlds.” He said he was saddened by the personal attacks made in the discussions on school re-opening. Mr. Merrill expressed support for having school five days a week, briefly noting how one of his children had struggled with online instruction while excelling when physically at school. Mr. Merrill said he doesn’t favor mask-wearing, but would agree to his children wearing them if it meant they could attend school onsite every week day. He asked for a determination of what constituted the need to move from a low risk school plan to a higher risk level, i.e. would it be based on positive COVID cases in Ketchikan, hospitalizations or deaths. Mr. Merrill also shared his thoughts on providing digital instruction for children who might get sick and need to stay at home. To the community, he asked that people pull together for the sake of their children.

Lori Ortiz said she spoke as a citizen as well as the homeschool coordinator for the school district. She said the district is trying hard to publicize and broaden the opportunity of the home school program for those families with a parent that can help their student at home. Ms. Ortiz spoke to the fear and pain expressed in the community, and said the superintendent, school board and teachers feel those emotions too. She expressed dismay with the tenor of the town hall meeting. Ms. Ortiz spoke of seeing the superintendent working long hours every day since the pandemic started. She said School Board members are also worrying, planning and listening. Ms. Ortiz noted that plans for next school year have progressed from zero to two days to four days of school. She implored the public to keep communicating and for everyone to work together in a positive manner.

W. Trent Headley said he had been asked by the community to speak regarding his 2019 resignation as the Board secretary from the school district. He shared the circumstances under which he left the district. Mr. Headley said he supports the petition mentioned earlier regarding the superintendent.

Christy Willis stated she’d grown up in Ketchikan and has worked in school districts here and elsewhere. She stated she doesn’t support anything that’s not five days a week of school. She spoke of the importance of school to children’s development and mental health and said that overrides the risk of contracting COVID. Ms. Willis said she’s considering moving to a school district that offers 100% in school time. Ms. Willis also predicted many parents will leave the district, and the district’s budget will suffer.

Theresa Elliot briefly shared what she has determined is the best school plan for her children. She said they need at least four days of core curriculum education taught by teachers. Otherwise, they will fall behind, she said.

Kevin Johnson, a parent and school district employee, stated he addressed the Board as a tribal citizen of Ketchikan Indian Community. He said he was concerned with district building administrators being moved to different schools or positions. Confusion is created by the moves, and it is already a tumultuous time during a pandemic, he said. He spoke about how the KIC health board has been dealing with its patients during this time. He concluded by asking if decisions were being made in the best interest of children.

Angela Blandov said she signed the circulating petition as she was concerned about school staff being moved around. She spoke of a need for more Alaskan educators and specifically to work with Alaska Native children. Ms. Blandov shared how teachers have helped her children, and talked about their special needs. She concluded by asking for communication and for people to be kind.

MJ Cadle told the Board that its job was to see to the education of Ketchikan’s children; and that it was not a health board. She spoke of the importance of school as a safe place for many children, and said that just a few days away from school could tear families apart. She spoke of her own daughter’s need for the structured environment of school to be successful. She stated the risk of getting COVID was very low; and the Board should worry instead about children’s safety, such as from domestic abuse. The Board needs to lead and not retreat, she said.

Shana Criscola said she doesn't support the school plan as drafted. She stated that parents weren't being paid attention to and that the leadership team already has its mind made up regarding the school re-start. Ms. Criscola said that her high schooler would rather move 3,000 miles away to another school, than do online school. He would have schooling opportunities there that he would not have here under the current Smart Start Plan, she indicated. She implored the Board to weigh heavily the comments of those who had spoken.

Rod Short said he hadn't been hearing about how high school extracurricular activities or elective courses would be handled during the upcoming year. His daughter, an incoming junior, "lives" for band, he said; and spoke briefly about the impact extracurriculars can have on students. He asked for thinking outside the box, as this is a time to do things differently, he said.

Kim Hodne commented on the community's involvement on the school issue and said that passion is high and nerves are raw. He criticized the planning process as clumsy, and said science has lost its credibility. Education is essential, he stated, and five days a week of school is needed. Mr. Hodne noted that many kids are engaged in sports, summer school and day care; and stated that education is the part that is upside down. He said the plan under consideration should be a "fallback."

Mandy Bowers referred to various activities that Ketchikan youth have attended, such as 2020 high school graduate events, with no COVID cases reported as a result. She talked about her children's excitement for the upcoming school year, and possible opportunities. One daughter is excited about culinary arts, she said; and another is interested in dance. Ms. Bower said they are ready to go to school at four days a week, and would be willing to help clean school areas to do so. She suggested this could be for community service. She also asked if CARES Act funds might be used to provide awnings at the school entrances to protect students from the weather during health checks before they enter.

#### Break

At the conclusion of public comments, a break was called in the meeting from about 7:35 p.m. to 7:57 p.m.

#### **ACTION regarding the Smart Start Plan and the 2020-2021 school year.**

Board President Mattson noted that action on the Smart Start Plan was the next item on the agenda. Board Member Sonya Skan asked to make some comments before motions were entertained. She stated she'd contacted the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) regarding the Board's role in the Smart Start plan. Although school districts need to have a plan for opening school, it isn't necessarily something the Board has to approve, she said. While DEED would like to have school boards agree with a plan, it is not necessary, she said. Ms. Skan said she was uncomfortable making a motion or voting on the plan.

Board Member Diane Gubatayao responded that she believes the Board is responsible for adopting a plan. It is important for the Board to vote as the community needs a decision, she said.

Board Member Jordan Tabb concurred with Ms. Gubatayao. He noted the tendency from federal government to the state and local level to try to delegate the decision-making on these types of issues elsewhere. He said the School Board is not a public health board; but the district has been tasked with planning for school at various risk levels. The district has collaborated with the local emergency operations regarding how local virus cases might correlate to those school risk levels. Mr. Tabb also stated he believes that elementary students will be in school 4 days a week under this plan. He commented that a mix of instruction by certified educators, paraprofessionals and digital means had been used before the pandemic; and that is the type of model he envisions occurring at the annexes. He also stated he believes that an added benefit of this plan is students being in a classroom with less kids, which can lead to better educational outcomes.

President Mattson asked for a motion to be introduced, before any more discussion was held.

#### **Motion to vote on acceptance of the Smart Start Plan for the 2020-2021 school year.**

Moved by: ROBBINS JR; Second by: TABB

## Discussion

Board Member Diane Gubatayao said her decision will be Ketchikan–centric, after noting some personal situations that affect her views. She commented on the low numbers of children affected by the virus, and that locally they were out being active. Ms. Gubatayao stated she would vote no on the plan as she wants a full open school schedule. She is opposed to moving sixth-graders out of the elementary schools, she added. She also said she might be in favor of retaining Friday professional development for teachers.

Board Member Paul Robbins Jr. first commented that science was continually evaluated and the Board will continue to work off of the most current data in regards to the virus. He spoke about basing Ketchikan’s school situation on Ketchikan’s numbers, and by consulting with local health officials and through community involvement. He stated he also agreed with Mr. Tabb that the plan that had been developed provides a fantastic opportunity to provide quality education with smaller class sizes. However, he indicated that Ketchikan is not currently at the point where it needs that type of plan. He cited examples of the Ketchikan Little League games being played with precautions; and social gatherings he’s attended - all with no outbreaks. A decision needs to be made to reflect what is happening in Ketchikan, stated Mr. Robbins Jr. He stated that Ketchikan students should be in front of teachers as much as possible.

Board Member Leslie Becker first stated appreciation for the public comment she’d heard and the emails she’d received. The Board has been elected to serve this community, she stated; and its children are its legacy, she stated. Ms. Becker said she fully supports 5 days a week school, and would vote no on the current plan. She stated it is a “retreat” plan if needed, and should not otherwise be adopted.

Board Member Tom Heutte said he supported the plan and that the team had worked hard and thought it out well. Modifications to the plan have been made as a result of input from the community, he added. Mr. Heutte said that science does have credibility, and noted he’d worked as a scientist with Dr. Fauci in the 80s. He also commented on the spikes of COVID cases in other states. Ketchikan has been able to keep cases low because it has taken measures to slow the spread. However, he added that relaxing measures in other states has led to a resurgence of cases. Mr. Heutte said he was pleased the plan was modified to add the annexes. He also described the school opening issue as being a decision handed to the Board to solve with what information it has now.

Ms. Gubatayao commented on the annex in terms of continuity of education and using paraprofessionals.

Ms. Mattson stated she has been on one of the planning teams since before spring break. She commented that progress has been made on the plan, as data has changed and mandates have changed. She said she appreciated how many people indicated they liked the current school plan, but didn’t feel it was needed at this time based on Ketchikan’s status. Ms. Mattson then shared the factors she’d been weighing regarding school re-opening. She commented on the work of teachers and principals in planning to get kids in school as much as possible; all done outside of their contract time. The Smart Start plan currently would provide for K-5 grades to attend school at 100 percent school for four days a week, she said. If the Board does not adopt this plan but instead opts for an “all in” school, the district wouldn’t be able to revert to this plan quickly if the town’s cases rise suddenly, she indicated. The backup plan would be 50 percent school levels, or even all distance learning. Ms. Mattson said this was the dilemma she saw.

Ms. Skan stated that there should be an all-in, no-risk plan based on Ketchikan’s COVID case numbers.

Superintendent Lougee explained that a “no-risk” plan for the district was a back to normal school situation, meaning the pandemic was over. A minimal risk had been included in the Smart Start plan originally, and was re-labeled as a no-risk.

Ms. Gubatayao commented that she thought the district could pivot from a full student attendance at school to a 50-percent situation fairly quickly. Those teachers who are uncomfortable at school can be the ones to teach virtually, or work for Fast Track, she said. Ms. Gubatayao said that the current plan does not really offer 4 days of school. She stated she would vote “no” on the plan, based on Ketchikan’s data and the science regarding spread.

Mr. Robbins Jr. proposed that the Smart Start plan be considered as a contingency plan for starting the school year.

It was pointed out that there was already a motion on the table for which a vote was necessary, before introducing a new motion.

**ROLL CALL** (on motion to approve the Smart Start Plan)  
**TABB, HEUTTE - AYES**  
**BECKER, SKAN, GUBATAYAO, ROBBINS JR., MATTSON - NAYS**

**MOTION FAILED**

**Motion to adopt the Smart Start Plan as a contingency for the 2020-2021 school year, and that the school year begin under the minimal risk scenario** (as a normal school year.)

Moved by: ROBBINS JR.; Second by: BECKER

**ROLL CALL**  
**SKAN, BECKER, GUBATAYAO, ROBBINS JR., MATTSON - AYES**  
**HEUTTE, TABB - NAYS**  
**5-2**

**MOTION PASSED**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**Motion to enter an executive session for Superintendent/Board Relations, a subject the immediate knowledge of which would clearly have an adverse effect upon the finances of the school district.**

Moved by: SKAN; Second by: BECKER

**ROLL CALL**  
**ROBBINS JR., BECKER, HEUTTE, SKAN, TABB, GUBATAYAO, MATTSON - ALL AYES**

**MOTION PASSED**

The Board entered the executive session at 8:42 p.m. The executive session ended at 9:59 p.m. and the Board re-entered the regular session.

Board Member Robbins Jr. stated that the executive session discussion had been on improving communication between the Board and Superintendent. The Board also requested clarification on the reasons behind the moving of administrators so Board Members could better respond to the public. The Board looks forward to evaluating the decision after the school year begins, and after seeing how that decision plays out, he added.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and with no objection, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

*Minutes approved as distributed at the August 12, 2020 regular meeting of the Board of Education.*

---

BOARD PRESIDENT  
Bridget Mattson