

KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR meeting of
Wednesday, February 23, 2022
Ketchikan Gateway Borough Assembly Chambers

CALL TO ORDER; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE; ROLL CALL

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough Board of Education met in regular session on the 23rd day of February, 2022, in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough Assembly Chambers. Board President Stephen Bradford 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 Stephen Bradford; Board Vice President Keenan Sanderson; Board Clerk-Treasurer Bridget Mattson; and Board Members Diane Gubatayao; Jordan Tabb; and Paul Robbins Jr. Board Member Nicole Anderson was present via teleconference. Student Board Member Braxton Zink was also present.

Administrative staff present included Interim Superintendent Melissa Johnson; Business Manager Katie Parrott; and Board Clerk Kerry Watson.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by unanimous consent.

PUBLIC RECOGNITION

Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month Proclamation: Board President Stephen Bradford read a proclamation for Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month for presentation to a representative from WISH. Peer educators Franchezca Mae Correa and Alyanna Dela Cruz were also introduced. Their role is to support their peers in making healthy relationships.

District spelling bee: It was announced that for the fourth year in a row, Thierry Oyedeji, now a sixth-grader, had won the district spelling bee.

Debate state tournament: Ketchikan High School's DDF team was lauded for winning the state title. The Drama, Debate, Forensics (DDF) coach, David Mitchel, and team members came to the podium to be recognized. The coach stated he was proud of the team's accomplishments and displayed the state championship plaque, and also the team's awards for sportsmanship and winning first in forensics. Mr. Mitchel introduced the team and invited any of them to speak. The seniors and the team are: Jocelyn Cannon, Eddie Gomez, Chloe Gosnell, Bella Kershaw, Lauren Olson, Braxton Zink, Morgan Davis and Peter Satya. Several of the DDF team members spoke about what DDF has meant to them, and thanked the community and educators for their support.

CITIZEN REMARKS

Parent Josh Workman asked why the local qualified individual wasn't hired as superintendent. He then spoke in support of amending the COVID mitigation plan, and commented on cloth masks not being effective. He said his children smiled when going to school this week.

Sheryl Yeisley stated that Melissa Johnson is home grown, Alaska Native and does a lot behind the scenes for students. She then complained about the manner in which the pick-up lane at Houghtaling Elementary School is managed. Ms. Yeisley concluded by speaking about her children's excitement at going to school with masks being optional.

Teresa Elliott and her two young daughters asked that masks be made optional in school, stating that masks distract them from focusing on their work.

Sophia Cook, a Schoenbar seventh-grade student, said that masks should be optional, and stated her delight at seeing her friend's face with no mask.

Christina Webber, parent of seven children, supported making masks optional, describing how several of her children struggle with not being able to read faces or understand speech due to required masks. She said children's mental health needs to be a focus, and that parents should be given their rights.

Becky King, parent and kindergarten teacher, asked the Board to look at how it would determine whether a child was sick and needed to be sent home. These factors need to be added to the protocol used in schools prior to COVID, she indicated.

Teacher Janae Merrill read a letter regarding her thoughts on the past two years of school during COVID, particularly issues with masking; and said her opinions were supported by about 20 other staff members. She also commented on what she'd viewed that week, with masks being optional. She said it is time to move on, and asks for masks to be optional at all risk levels.

Avery Thomas, senior at Kayhi, commented on why masks should be optional at school, and said this week with optional masking felt different. People should have the choice at any risk level, she said.

Liz Thomas stated that the majority of parents and students have indicated they want the choice of masking or not at school. She remarked on other places in the nation where students have not had to wear masks at school and didn't get sick. The Board's time to make medical decisions for our students needs to end, stated Ms. Thomas.

Autumn Bremer said her four boys were with her to support making masks optional. Her son Christopher Bremer said he can't tell people's facial expressions because of masks.

Ketchikan Charter School principal Kayla Livingston said a survey of charter school's parents and staff showed support for optional masking. Ms. Livingston also shared her observations that day in seeing younger students without masks and in particular with learning phonograms. Ms. Livingston asked that the protocol for determining whether staff and students need to stay home due to illness be reviewed, if masks are made optional.

MJ Cadle said science doesn't support mask wearing and the requirement should be ended. She also said teachers should have the power to ask that a child be sent home, if sick.

Richard Harney said there were inconsistencies among schools in dealing with test to stay, athletic policies and more. He described a situation which had occurred when his child was determined to be a close contact.

Sally Stockhausen, Kayhi teacher, spoke as a member of the state Board of Education, inviting the Board to the first Alaska Science of Reading Symposium April 29-May 1. She commented on the state's low reading scores compared to the rest of the nation and said that training of teachers, administrators and other education leaders in the science of reading was needed.

Student Kadin Morris said that masks should be optional. He said he feels like he will faint when wearing a mask in gym class. He added that he saw his friends' faces for the first time this week.

Christy Willis described how her child saw her teacher outside of school for the first time without a mask. She said it was a fantastic week at school, due to masks not being required.

District employee Christian Lorenzo supported masks being optional, and cited inconsistencies with mitigations during school, and at the same facility for after school programs. He shared that kids were full of life at school this week.

Lauren Munhoven said that children who are sneezing or coughing shouldn't be sent to school, and suggested the school district continue offering testing of those symptoms. She also stated parents should be allowed back in school.

Kayhi senior Max Malouf said there was "positivity" this week at school with no required masking. He asked that this be retained for the future students.

Annette Headley, said her daughter, Venellope, doesn't want to wear masks anymore at school but was too shy to state it herself.

Brock Thomas, high school senior, said that masks should be optional, and added it had been great this week.

Sharli Arntzen, accompanied by her daughter Ava, supported making masks optional. She said she hoped that looking at a "well child" policy didn't delay the Board's decision.

Written comments submitted with the request that they be read at the meeting were then read.

Brenda Loughman wrote in support of maintaining COVID policies and not allowing infectious children to attend school.

In her comments, Jamie Doyon asked that the Board not change any mask mitigation until after Spring Break. She also wrote of her concern with the potential that COVID positive children would be allowed in school.

Houghtaling Elementary School reading specialist Valerie Brooks provided citations in her written comments to support her statement that discontinuing masking and permitting COVID-positive individuals in schools would violate Alaska PTPC (Professional Teaching Practices Commission) mandates and school district policy.

Lucy Ortiz, Houghtaling fifth-grade teacher, supported continuing with the current Start Strong plan and mitigations, writing it would keep students, families, and staff safe.

Kim Smith wrote that she was pleading with the Board to make masking optional in the schools immediately, writing that students should be given the choice.

An email from Kevin Johnson stated that removing the mask mandate directly impacts the activities mitigation plan for spectators. This could impact whether teams come to Ketchikan for the Regional V Basketball Tournament, he wrote.

Break

A break was taken from 7:08 to 7:20 p.m.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Borough Assembly/School Board Liaison Committee - Paul Robbins Jr., reported that the liaison committee heard from both the borough's and school district's financial experts regarding the financial situation of the two entities. More meetings are scheduled after the district has prepared more of a draft budget, and once there has been public testimony into the school district budget.

Native Education Committee - Keenan Sanderson reported on the Native Education Committee's meeting the previous day. The committee's discussion included: the previous year's committee activities; incorporating more cultural sensitivity in the district's strategic plan; and topics to discuss with the Ketchikan Indian Community. Committee member Jordan Tabb added that Sonya Skan of KIC had provided feedback to the committee, including addressing the "soft drop out" risk at the middle school age.

Curriculum committee: Board member Mattson said a partial math committee met, and a proposal for math materials will come before the Board at the first meeting in March.

CLAIMS FOR INFORMATION - For Information - *Claims of February 18, 2022. - no comments or objections.*

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Interim Superintendent Melissa Johnson first briefly spoke to the district's drug prevention curriculum, which was in response to Board members' queries at previous meetings. The materials seem to be inconsistently used, she said. She then announced several significant scholarships earned by four seniors, as shared by Kayhi Principal Jason House.

Student Member Report: Student Member Braxton Zink followed up with additional comments on one of the scholarship awardees. He said that Chloe Gosnell not only is receiving a full ride scholarship to University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; but she will also receive \$10,000 to pursue her own studies in her chosen field. He commented that students are pumped for the basketball regionals which start March 9 in Ketchikan. Braxton noted the accomplishments of the ACDC team at its recent competition. Braxton also noted that parent teacher conferences are occurring March 7 and 8. Lastly, he commented that this week marked the first time this year in which the district dropped to substantial risk from high. As a result, it was the first time that masks weren't required at school.

Fawn Mountain Elementary School

Fawn Mountain Elementary School Principal Nick Higson started his report by commenting on the last three school days with people seeing each other's faces without masks.

He listed each of the school's goals for 2021-22, and expounded a bit on each. One goal is to make sure kids are safe at school, and he commented on how COVID mitigation had played a part. Mr. Higson also stated that this has been the hardest year of his career because of the divisive nature in the community, and that stress was reflected in parents and their children, and then impacted felt the teachers and staff. To improve staff and student morale, which was another goal, the school will increase student opportunities outside of the classroom, he said. Commenting on the goal of improving student attendance, Principal Higson said it should be at 96 or 97 percent, while this year it was at 86 percent.

Meeting the social and emotional and academic needs of students was the last goal noted by the principal; and he asked Fawn Mountain counselor David Garcia to speak to that. Mr. Garcia said that getting to know the children is the most important factor in being successful in meeting their social and emotional needs. He stressed it is key to recognizing the ACES (adverse childhood experiences) indicators in the children and families in concert with social service agencies. The students hear presentations weekly on subjects to educate and help them deal with traumatic experiences, with topics such as personal space, substance abuse, bullying, and dealing with mental illness, said Mr. Garcia.

Fawn Mountain paraprofessional Selena Jackson provided statistics on the school's RTI (Response to Intervention) program, which she said she's been doing for ten years. She showed the Board graphs illustrating the improvements in reading and math from the fall to winter AIMS Web results with kindergarten, second and sixth graders. One highlight of note was that half the second graders she was working with had improved enough to "graduate" out of the RTI program. She answered some questions from Board members. Mr. Higson also showed a clip of kindergarten teacher Mandy Buckingham working with her students on reading.

After also sharing about special programs that occur at his school, Principal Higson concluded the school report with Fawn Mountain paraprofessional Christian Lorenzo describing the role he plays at Fawn Mountain to bring "sunshine" and to encourage it in the students.

CONSENT CALENDAR of February 9, 2022

- a. Motion to approve the special meeting minutes of January 31, 2022.
- b. Motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of February 9, 2022.
- c. Motion to approve the special meeting minutes of February 10, 2022.

Motion to approve the Consent Calendar of February 23, 2022.

Moved by: GUBATAYAO; Second by: ROBBINS JR.

MOTION APPROVED WITHOUT OBJECTION

NEW BUSINESS

Motion to approve an Employment Contract with Mr. Michael Robbins as Superintendent of Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District, for a term of two years, commencing on or about July 1, 2022.

Moved by: ROBBINS JR.; Second by: TABB

Discussion

Mr. Robbins Jr., stated he was one of the Board members appointed to negotiate the superintendent contract. He commented on the amount of community and stakeholder group input into the finalist interview process. He said it was telling that the selection decision was unanimous by the Board; and that all the stakeholder groups chose Mr. Robbins as their first choice.

Ms. Gubatayao noted that the contract specifies that Mr. Robbins will be required to earn a superintendent endorsement by July 1, when his employment commences. Ms. Mattson added that when the position was advertised through AASB and finalists were chosen, the Board was aware that this finalist was working on his endorsement.

Mr. Tabb commented on what the Board could and could not speak about with the superintendent finalist process, cautioning that it could not speak to specifics about individual finalists, but only about the overall process.

ROLL CALL

Student Member Braxton Zink (preferential vote) - AYE

SANDERSON, TABB, ROBBINS JR., ANDERSON, GUBATAYAO, MATTSON, BRADFORD - ALL AYES

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Motion to approve the sabbatical for Peter Stanton for the 2022-2023 school year.

Moved by: SANDERSON; Second by: MATTSON

Discussion

Board Member Mattson stated she is excited about Mr. Stanton's sabbatical project.

Board Member Tabb asked if Mr. Stanton would explain his sabbatical project for the listening community. He came forward to do so, first introducing himself in Tlingit. The Kayhi teacher stated that he views being an educator as a vocation, adding there is always more that he wants to do than he has time for. The sabbatical would provide the time and deep work to resume research from his college thesis and to make the knowledge available to students and educators, he said. Mr. Stanton's intent is to learn and write more about the story of 19th century Tlingit history.

Mr. Robbins said he supported the sabbatical proposal overall, but would vote in opposition because the district is under a teacher shortage, in a budget crunch and would be losing a great teacher for a year.

Mr. Stanton was invited to respond. He said the district is legally obligated to grant sabbaticals every year; and as he is just entering his eighth year of teaching, his situation would be on the cheaper end of sabbaticals. He also indicated there were several teachers wanting to fill his position during the sabbatical.

Ms. Mattson also pointed out that the Board is contractually obligated to grant two sabbaticals per year if there are qualified applicants. There is never a good time to be an educator out of the district, she stated.

Board Member Sanderson stated that Mr. Stanton had put a lot of effort into the school district, and his goal was to bring back knowledge to the community and school district. He added that as Native, he appreciates any effort to uplift the Native community.

Student Braxton Zink commented on his experience with Mr. Stanton as a teacher for a number of classes including AP World history, and French class; and said he is very confident in the value that he will bring back to the district from his sabbatical.

Mr. Robbins asked the superintendent if she thought a replacement could be found easily as Mr. Stanton had stated; and she responded affirmatively.

Board members Gubatayao, Tabb and Anderson also commented positively on Mr. Stanton's sabbatical plans.

ROLL CALL

Student Member Braxton Zink (preferential vote) - AYE

ANDERSON, GUBATAYAO, ROBBINS JR., TABB, SANDERSON, MATTSON, BRADFORD - ALL AYES

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

COVID MITIGATION ACTION ITEM

Motion that the Board of Education direct the Start Strong plan be amended to make masking optional at all risk levels and to end the practice of sending asymptomatic persons home from school.

Moved by: ROBBINS JR.; Second by: ANDERSON

Splitting the motion

President Bradford suggested dividing the two parts of the motion into two separate subjects, splitting the motion. There was concurrence.

The masking optional motion was considered first, the applicable motion being:

Motion that the Start Strong plan be amended to make masking optional at all risk levels.

Discussion

In speaking to his motion, Mr. Robbins stated its intent was not to remove the Start Strong plan itself as it is required by the state of Alaska. Neither was it an action to remove all mitigations, he added. It is a motion to remove masks from children at school. It is time to move forward and let people choose whether to mask or not, stated Mr. Robbins Jr.

Braxton remarked on the need to have a backup plan. If cases skyrocket and with basketball regions coming up there should at least be a mask mandate at high risk, he said.

Ms. Anderson indicated there was a cost to kids having to wear masks. She said the board shouldn't be directing the medical concerns of its students.

Ms. Gubatayao spoke to her own choice not to wear a mask. She cited the percentage of Ketchikan residents who are vaccinated. She stated the masking at school should be a choice, and also stated that the other mitigations are not being removed.

Referencing its website, Ms. Mattson said the Fairbanks school district is operating at a moderate risk level with masking optional. There is no contact tracing, but there would be if there is an outbreak at a school, she said. In addition, masking would then be required to prevent going to distance learning. She suggested operating Ketchikan's schools at a moderate risk level, but leaving the current mitigation plan in place as back up.

Mr. Tabb said he did not support removing the most consistent mitigation measures, but he also trusted the superintendent and administrative staff to raise levels if needed on a school specific basis.

Mr. Bradford said the mitigation plan had worked and brought the district to this substantial level where masks are optional. However, he expressed a concern with what other communities coming for basketball regionals would be expecting for mitigation measures.

Interim Superintendent Johnson confirmed that those planning on attending the tournament from other communities are expecting certain mitigation plans to be in place.

There was continued discussion, including from student member Zink who spoke about mask wearing to protect himself and others.

Mr. Tabb asked Ms. Johnson if there would be any unintended consequences if school level risk levels were made by her as superintendent. She responded it was fine in theory, but the Board needed to support her decisions. Mr. Tabb commented on the Board as a whole supporting its decisions once made.

An amendment was proposed regarding optional masking only being specific to school hours. There was more discussion, including Ms. Mattson again proposing that setting the district risk level at moderate would resolve the Board's objectives.

Ultimately the amendment was withdrawn. President Bradford then called for the vote on the motion to amend the start strong plan to make masking optional.

ROLL CALL

Student Member Braxton Zink (preferential vote) - NAY

ROBBINS JR., SANDERSON, GUBATAYAO, TABB, ANDERSON, MATTSON, BRADFORD - NAYS

MOTION FAILED

Motion that the district set the Moderate Risk level of the Start Strong plan as the standard operating risk level district-wide and that movements up in risk level be determined at the building level by the Superintendent.

Moved by: MATTSON; Second by: TABB

Discussion

Board Member Sanderson commented on the potential criticism of the staff if potentially contentious decisions are made. He'd rather the heat come onto the Board, he said.

There was discussion about Board oversight and supporting staff's decisions regarding risk levels at individual schools.

ROLL CALL (on moderate risk level setting)

Student Member Braxton Zink (preferential vote) - ABSTAIN

TABB, ROBBINS JR., MATTSON, GUBATAYAO, ANDERSON, SANDERSON, BRADFORD - ALL AYES

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Second part of split motion considered

To end the practice of sending asymptomatic persons (students and staff) home from school.

After some discussion about the need for clarity regarding COVID positive asymptomatic individuals, Mr. Robbins withdrew the motion, and replaced it with:

Motion to amend the Start Strong plan to cease testing of asymptomatic students and staff, outside of that required for student activities.

Discussion

Board Member Tabb pointed out if sick students and staff remain in school this could represent a breach of the negotiated labor agreements with teachers and with paraprofessionals. Both agreements have specific language about being protected against contagious persons, he stated; and the relevant sections of the labor agreements.

Mr. Robbins Jr. indicated that based on that argument, there would never be a time the district would stop testing for COVID or allow an asymptomatic person in school. The district needs to start treating COVID just as any other disease at school, he said. The point of his motion is to make the changes necessary to keep kids in school. That premise includes not sending them home if they're not sick, said Board member Robbins.

Discussion ensued. Interim Superintendent Ms. Johnson gave her input on ceasing the “test to stay” option based on the discussion. (i.e. testing for 5 days after being a close contact to be able to stay in school.) She said that health aides at the schools are doing literally hundreds of tests daily for “test to stay” of close contacts. By making masks optional, she predicted the number of positive cases would overburden staff with contact tracing and testing to stay, and so recommended those programs cease.

There was more discussion, including on how families would be notified that there was a positive case in a class, or at the high school level, in multiple levels. It was suggested that testing could still be used in the case of an outbreak at schools.

Mr. Tabb stated his discomfort with moving forward with this action, without hearing from medical experts after the district is at Moderate risk for a time. Mitigations should be changed slowly to see the effect, he suggested.

ROLL CALL

Student Member Braxton Zink (preferential vote) - NAY
ROBBINS JR., ANDERSON, GUBATAYAO, MATTSON - AYES
SANDERSON, TABB, BRADFORD - NAYS

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MOTION PASSED

Student Member Braxton Zink was excused from the rest of the meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - Negotiations with TSLO

Motion to move into executive session to discuss labor negotiations with the Technology Staff Labor Organization, a matter the immediate knowledge of which would clearly have an adverse effect upon the finances of the school district, as provided for by Board Bylaw 9321 and AS 44.62.310.

Moved by: TABB; Second by: MATTSON

ROLL CALL

ANDERSON, GUBATAYAO, MATTSON, ROBBINS JR., SANDERSON, BRADFORD - ALL AYES

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

The Board entered executive session at 9:48 p.m. The executive session ended at 10:01 p.m. and the Board resumed its regular session.

Motion to Board of Education ratify the 2021-2024 Negotiated Labor Contract between KGBSD and the TSLO.

Moved by: TABB; Second by: GUBATAYAO

ROLL CALL

TABB, ROBBINS JR., MATTSON, GUBATAYAO, ANDERSON, SANDERSON, BRADFORD - ALL AYES

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion to enter an Executive Session to review the findings of the investigation of February 5, 2022, a matter which by law, municipal charter, or ordinance is required to be confidential; and a matter involving consideration of government records that by law are not subject to public disclosure.

Moved by: TABB; Second by: MATTSON

ROLL CALL

ANDERSON, TABB, GUBATAYAO, MATTSON, ROBBINS JR., SANDERSON, BRADFORD - ALL AYES

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Extend the meeting

Motion to extend the meeting beyond 10:30 for the sole purpose of allowing time to conduct the executive session.

Moved by: TABB; Second by: ROBBINS JR.

There was unanimous consent for the motion.

The Board entered the executive session at about 10:09 p.m. The executive session ended at 11:02 p.m. and the Board came back into regular session.

Statement

Board President Bradford said that in the executive session, the board had reviewed a report on the findings of the investigation into the weekend of February 5, 2022. A plan of action that the district will be taking was “outlined” and it is anticipated that a statement from the administration and the Board of Education will be released that Friday, he said.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other action items on the agenda and after brief comments on upcoming events, the meeting was adjourned without objection at 11:06 p.m.

Minutes approved as distributed at the March 9, 2022 regular meeting of the Board of Education.

BOARD PRESIDENT
Stephen Bradford