

TMCS Board Minutes
January 28, 2021

The January 28, 2021, 6:00 pm meeting held via Zoom conference call was called to order at 6:04 pm by Tanya Blackford. All members of the board were notified of the meeting, a quorum was present.

Attending board members were Tanya Blackford, Aimie Burns, Jeannette Butterworth, Cathey Chet (non-voting member), Emily Cowan, Tricia King, Tamara Lee, Ann Lentini, Rick Prudhomme, Rebecca Schwartz, Brad Ward.

Attending staff members were Jessica Arriaga, Claire Jones, Terry Kelly, Noelle McKay, Denise Pesce.

Denise requested this special meeting of the board of directors to review the COVID-19 conditions and response within our state and area and to decide if The Mountain Community School will remain in Plan C or transition into Plan A or Plan B.

Principal's Report

Henderson County Update

The Henderson County Board of Education met Monday evening and chose to reopen grades K-3 to Plan A and grades 4-12 to Plan B.

Denise sent a copy of the daily infection rates she has been tracking to the board. Cases are slowly coming down to 8.2%. They remain in the red but they are trending downward.

The county is still currently only testing people who have symptoms. Denise still feels this is an issue but not enough to use a sole basis for remaining in remote.

If TMCS does return to Plan B, Alice Elio, the school nurse, will work with the school again.

Regarding staff vaccines, Denise does not think it is likely teachers will have access before the end of February or March. She has been working with Milton Butterworth and Amy Treece with Pardee on getting teachers in the queue under the third pool. Henderson county has over 30,000 adults age 65+ that have to be served.

Recommendation

Denise is recommending the school return to a hybrid format (Plan B). Sunset would be reopened, but capped at 20 kids.

Denise proposes they reopen to Plan B on Thursday February 4. Teachers need time to prepare and transition their materials from home to school.

Kindergarten will start in ½ days, four days a week as it functioned previously under Plan B. If case counts come down Denise is considering that kids have more time in school.

Elementary EC children will continue to receive support on their remote learning days. The EC teachers are working on a different plan for middle school kids. Middle schoolers have been more accessible over remote.

The school is looking into doing lunch outdoors – the school now has two large out door heaters. The McGrady building is also a possibility.

Discussion

Denise submitted in the meeting packets two letters from parents who wrote in support of reopening the school. A third letter was received too late to be submitted before the meeting. Denise read the parent letter out loud. It also supported reopening.

Two board members expressed concern over the data, both that the numbers are still high and that with conflicting reports they have a difficult time determining their accuracy. These, along with safety concerns, especially for the teachers will making voting to reopen to Plan B difficult for them.

Discussion continued regarding the teacher’s reaction and safety.

- Denise had communicated to staff that she was recommending they return to Plan B. There is some apprehension and some would rather wait to have their vaccines, but no one, thus far, has said they are unwilling to return to Plan B.
- Denise thinks many teachers prefer remote to Plan B because they feel safer, because it’s difficult to run both a remote platform and in-person at the same time, and because for the kids that remain in full remote, they don’t get as much attention as the students who are in-person.
- Teachers who were present at the meeting commented on how the situation wasn’t ideal and that transitioning was hard, but they also felt the need to get back to the kids.
- Denise says that not all staff members may speak up in a zoom meeting, but she does check in with them all regularly. Some may prefer to be home, but are willing to return to school.

A board member shared an article from local pediatricians that was submitted to Henderson County. They said they were seeing relatively low transmission rates among children but had concerns about suicide, eating disorders, and mental health issues.

Denise said one of the benefits to having a smaller school is that our cohorts are smaller. She also feels we have done more than the average school to make safety improvements, and that we have had especially good communication with parents about exposures and symptoms.

Vote

Rick Prudhomme made a motion to approve reopening to Plan B beginning February 4th, 2021 as presented to the board, seconded by Jeannette Butterworth. Membership voting recorded as:

Blackford	Aye
Burns	Aye
Butterworth	Aye
Cowan	Aye
King	Aye
Lee	Nay
Lentini	Nay
Prudomme	Aye
Schwartz	Nay
Ward	Abstained

The motion carried with 6 votes in favor, 3 against, 1 abstention.

The next board meeting is scheduled for February 23, 2021 at 6:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 6:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Noelle McKay.