

*SHALER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Committee of the Whole Meeting
January 13, 2021 – Virtual
Minutes*

The Board of School Directors of the Shaler Area School District held a Committee of the Whole Meeting on Wednesday, January 13, 2020, on Zoom, a virtual meeting platform, with Mr. Jim Tunstall, School Board President, presiding. This meeting began at 7:18 p.m.

Board Members Present: Mrs. Suzanna Donahue
Mr. James Fisher
Mr. Tim Gapsky
Dr. April Kwiatkowski
Mr. Jason Machajewski
Mrs. Jeanne Petrovich
Mrs. Eileen Phillips
Mr. Steve Romac
Mr. James Tunstall

Others Present: Dr. Sean Aiken, Superintendent
Dr. Bryan O’Black, Assistant Superintendent
Ms. Sherri Ludwig, Director of Business Affairs
Dr. Kathleen Graczyk, Director of Student Services
Mr. Matt Hoffman, Solicitor

Notice of this meeting was posted as required.

- Mr. James Tunstall called the meeting to order at 7:18 p.m.

Dr. O’Black then announced the following Education Items:

<u>ITEM</u>		<u>SUP</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
#	<u>EDUCATION ITEMS RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL</u>	#	<u>TAKEN</u>
A.1	Approve the Shaler Area High School Course Description Handbook for the 2021-22 school year.	A.1	_____
A.2	Approve the first reading of the following new policies: a. Policy No. 218.3 – Discipline of Student Convicted/Adjudicated of Sexual Assault b. Policy No. 253 – Dating Violence	A.2	_____

- Dr. Kwiatkowski questioned the language in Policy No. 218.3. Mr. Hoffman explained that it is to protect the victim.
- Dr. Kwiatkowski also asked about the high school’s course description book and if course enrollment numbers are considered from year to year. High School Assistant Principal Tom Misko said the high school administration looks at any course below 10 students per class. He said there are some options used to hold low-enrollment courses such as holding classes concurrently such as Carpentry 1 and 2. Dr. Kwiatkowski asked if there are any disciplines that have had to expand options. Mr. Misko said the junior class is larger and therefore the high school has had to adjust staff in core content areas.

Dr. O’Black then announced the following Information Items:

Information Items:

1. Student Representatives – Zoe Babbit & Catherine Clark were not present.
2. Shaler Area Education Foundation – Mrs. Philips said a new set of mini grants will be made available to staff to help teachers with any challenges to help make classrooms more accessible in a pandemic. The grants will be up to \$250 and the Foundation hopes to grant at least one per building. The Foundation has finalized its mission and vision and also is working with the Alumni Association on the 50th anniversary celebration.
3. Attestation Ensuring Implementation of Mitigation Efforts – Dr. Aiken & Dr. O’Black shared that the district is following the state Department of Health’s universal masking order and recommendations for when positive cases of COVID-19 are identified in school as part of their presentation on the plan to return to hybrid learning.
4. Return to Hybrid Learning – Dr. Aiken & Dr. O’Black presented information to the school board regarding the district’s planned transition back to hybrid learning the following week. Dr. Aiken outlined the transition to hybrid instruction plan. Dr. O’Black explained the guidelines to close a school based on case counts, introduced the dashboard, explained the universal face covering mandate, and highlighted the daily symptom screening and its importance. Dr. Aiken provided an update on the state’s travel restrictions and emphasized the importance of contacting the school nurse. Dr. Kwiatkowski suggested that the school nurse information be made more accessible on the district website. Dr. Kwiatkowski also thanked the teaching staff for all they’ve done to make sure students succeed. Mr. Gapsky thanked the administration, staff and board members for delaying the return to hybrid for one additional week from the initial proposed plan. He said while it wasn’t a popular decision, he said it was one that was made to keep everyone safe. Mr. Gapsky also congratulated Dr. Aiken on completing his doctorate.

Ms. Ludwig then announced the following Finance Items:

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUP</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
#	#	TAKEN
<u>FINANCE AND OPERATION ITEMS RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL</u>		
C.1 APPROVE FUND PROFILES:		
A. General Fund – Schedule of Bills and Addendum	C.1A	_____
B. Cafeteria Fund – Schedule of Bills	C.1B	_____
C. Bond Proceeds – Schedule of Bills	C.1C	_____
D. Budget Transfers	C.1D	_____
E. Year-to-Date Financial Reports	C.1E	_____
F. Fund Profiles and Investments	C.1F	_____
 C.2 Cafeteria Fund Operating Statement	 C.2	 _____
 C.3 The Administration recommends acknowledging receipt of the lists of unpaid taxes as submitted and further, the Board charges the appointed Tax Collectors with the responsibility for delinquent tax collections. Collections will occur until the	 C.3	 _____

Administration advises the Tax Collectors the date of which they will turn over collections to Pennsylvania (PA) Municipal Services (PAMS).

Municipality	Number of Properties	Face Value
Etna Borough	271	\$ 247,584.56
Millvale Borough	464	\$ 614,385.67
Reserve Township	284	\$ 255,106.07
Shaler Township	909	\$1,809, 020.44

- C.4 Approval of the Base Bid and Alt Bid #1 to Tri-Star Motors for the purchase of the Ford 2020 F350 Truck w/stake body & snowplow in the amount of \$45,643. C.4
- C.5 Approve the use of national and state cooperative procurement programs for the calendar year 2021, including Keystone Purchasing Network (KPN), CoStars, PEPPM, and the Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies (AEPA).
- C.6 Approve a resolution to authorize the district to not raise taxes in an amount that exceeds the Act 1 index for the 2021-22 budget. C.6
- C.7 Approve the resolution relating to the compensation for the real estate tax collection for the four years 2022 through 2026.

Etna Borough	\$ 9,204.00
Millvale Borough	9,204.00
Reserve Township	9,204.00
Shaler Township	21,840.00

Cost of statements, preparation, forms expenses, surety bond, postage costs, and other reasonable expenses, where applicable, to be shared equally with each municipality. The elected tax collectors will provide their own office and office assistants. The elected tax collectors must follow all procedures and rules as defined by Act 48, Local Tax Collection Law. District reporting rules and regulations must also be followed.

- C.8 Approve an amendment to the agreement with ANG Real Estate, LLC as follows: The parties agree that the period of the VERIFICATION OF ZONING FOR PROPOSED USE CONTINGENCY is extended to the same duration as, and shall run concurrent with, the 90-day CHANGE OF ZONING/MUNICIPAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSED USE CONTINGENCY. C.8

- Ms. Ludwig introduced The Nutrition Group Regional Manager Kim Cassidy and Sue Cook, food service director, to talk about the district’s food service. She thanked The Nutrition Group for serving more than 30,000 meals to date from several off-site locations. Ms. Cassidy said before COVID, the department was doing very well and still able to end last year with a profit. The Nutrition Group still is meeting weekly with district administration and principals because the environment continues to change. The biggest struggle is that there are still the same amount of buildings but not the same amount of students, however the number of buildings requires the same amount of staff which makes a difference to break even. When the district is in 100 percent virtual, the food service department can limit staff and use the product it has on hand. Now the food service department is starting to add a la carte items available and the department is addressing how to do that safely. Ms. Cassidy said the principals have been very supportive. She said even with everything in place, they don’t believe they will break even. Their goal is to reduce the loss as much as possible. Dr. Kwiatkowski asked about operating costs during the school closures. Ms. Cassidy said that the department continued to feed students. In virtual, all students get all five meal items, when they are in person, students could choose not to take all items. Additionally, the cost of food and paper have increased. Ms. Cassidy said they are getting a higher reimbursement rate on each child, but they are not sure how that impacts the budget. Ms. Ludwig explained that the district gets reimbursement for meals but in the past, the district has had to offset costs with a la carte items. Additionally, there have been no staff meals or catering costs this year. Ms. Cassidy said that the district still has seven buildings and because of social distancing, each building still requires the same number of staff. Dr. Kwiatkowski asked if the district needed to address the loss formally because the contract guarantees a profit. Ms. Ludwig said the district can start conversations to see what the options may be. Ms. Ludwig added that because of a federal extension, the free meals to all students continues through June. Ms. Cassidy said the department already is looking at next year. She said that the contract is set for a certain set of circumstances and when the circumstances change, the contract changes. Dr. Kwiatkowski asked about creative solutions and staffing options. Ms. Cassidy said the department is open to all solutions.
- Mr. Romac asked for the specific documents related to Item C.4. Ms. Ludwig said she would share them.
- Dr. Kwiatkowski asked if the delinquent taxes are comparable with past years. Ms. Ludwig said there has not been a dramatic percentage difference from previous years. Dr. Kwiatkowski also asked if money was available for people due to COVID. Ms. Ludwig said there is currently no legislation out there.
- Mr. Tunstall then invited the board to speak on any other business.
 - Mr. Romac asked for an update on the Backpack Initiative. Dr. Aiken said over the last year and a half the program has transitioned from the middle school to Scott Primary School. This year, the program has partnered with Emmanuel Lutheran Church, and a group of retirees meets there to package the food. Additionally, the community has been very generous with providing donations to the program and school counselor Maryann Swartz, who coordinates the program, does a great job of creating community partnerships.
 - Mr. Gapsky asked about a date for a Transportation Committee meeting. Dr. Aiken said possibly the first week in February. The district is still waiting for ABC Transit to confirm its availability.
 - Mr. Gapsky also asked if there is any consideration to purchase masks with transparent windows so students can see the mouths of teachers. Dr. Graczyk said the district purchased quite a few, however the problem is that the “windows” fog up easily and they were becoming more of a barrier and leaving them on for long periods of time was more cumbersome.
- Mr. Tunstall then recognized the public to speak on any other items:
 - Crystal Lehmeier, of Hillwood Road, said she appreciated that many of her questions were answered with the return to hybrid presentation, however she said there is a lack of transparency and cohesion within the district. She said there are districts around Shaler Area that are open for five days a week in-person instruction but the county numbers seem to be affecting the district as a whole. She said the district’s cases have been relatively low in the schools. She said she is encouraged by the new tracker to be placed on the website. She said parents are feeling left out of the process. The last parent survey was in June. She said

most of the district staff have been very helpful and quick to respond but there needs to be some plan because hybrid is not enough. She also encouraged that when 5-day instruction is planned to not give false hope to families and change the start date. She said 650 people in the district signed a petition to have 5-day in-person instruction in the district. Dr. Aiken thanked Ms. Lehmeier for sharing her concerns and for her openness and honesty. He said the district can always improve its transparency and communication with parents. He said the district wants to move into hybrid. There are a lot of school districts that are in person but also many that are not. Dr. Aiken said the district is looking at 5-day instruction especially at the primary/elementary level and if conditions in the county allow that. He said the district will continue to make the best decisions for Shaler Area, and he feels a sense of hope bringing students back into the buildings.

- Debbie Sutton, of Redstone Drive, asked why students don't have the option to attend 5 days per week. Dr. Aiken said the district has been in the process of adhering the guidelines while the county is in substantial community spread. He said the district would like to get students back into hybrid and achieve some success. He said he'd like to see the district's number and county's numbers stabilize. The reality is to take the next step from virtual to hybrid. He said he doesn't have a timeline for adding in-person instruction days.
- Chris Luka, of Mary Ann Drive, said the district needs to increase its transparency and communication. He asked what kind of creative problem solving the district is considering to transition students back to hybrid and 5-day instruction. He said he feels Shaler Area is behind the curve and has not had any innovative thinking. Dr. Aiken said there are creative options that the district could consider, but the district also has to consider the safety of students and staff. He said the district started to look at students who are faltering and look at options to bring those students back four days per week. A lot of district have gone to five days per week but many have not. The district needs to make the best decisions for Shaler Area. He said the district has taken a cautious approach and is looking at February to get elementary students back to five days. He said the district has stepped through the process cautiously and will transition to five days when it is safe. Mr. Tunstall added that it has always been the goal of the board and administration to get students back five days.
- Pat Murray, of McElheny Road, outlined some of the creative solutions that other districts are using. He asked why it appears Shaler Area is always reacting. He gave the examples that other districts had dashboards at the beginning of the school year, Shaler Area did not roll out Flexible Instruction Days last year which would have helped at the beginning of the pandemic, and Shaler Area waited until after Christmas to announce it would go back two weeks after Christmas. He said that is what a lot of the frustration is coming from. Dr. Aiken said every district has had to be reactive because of the pandemic. There are a lot of districts who are in the same position as Shaler Area. He added that the district made the decision not to have a tracker at the beginning of the school year when its numbers were low because it would have been too easy to single out an individual, and the district wanted to protect student and staff privacy. However, as the district transitions back to hybrid instruction now, the tracker will play a role in helping families and staff know how close their building is to a possible closure. He said there is no definitive number to move to five-day instruction, and the district will do so when it is safe.
- Matt Urban, of Horizon Drive, said that the parents understand that it is a difficult decision. He said that it looks like there isn't a plan at Shaler Area. Other school districts are doing it but it doesn't look like it's important here. He said if the district doesn't have a plan it will never meet its goals. Dr. Kwiatkowski said there are two goals, the education of students and the safety of the students, that have met head on. She said she understands the frustration; she has it in her home. But, there is a lot that goes into consideration as the district moves forward.
- Mr. Luka argued that in the past Burchfield Primary housed Scott Primary students. Dr. Kwiatkowski said that is one building. Not all buildings have the same available space and the district needs to consider all seven buildings. Mr. Luka said the parents want to be part of the solution. Dr. Kwiatkowski said the public is invited to every board meeting.
- Ms. Lehmeier asked why there haven't been any additional surveys of the parents. Dr. Aiken said the district tries to be intentional with surveys, but that this could be an appropriate time to survey families again. He said while there are many families who want 5-day instruction, there also are families who can't believe the district is considering it when the county is experiencing substantial community spread.

- Dr. Kwiatkowski encouraged families to access the district's resources and counseling services. Dr. Aiken said the district recognizes the impact of isolation and recognizes the social and emotional needs of students are just as important as their health and safety from COVID. Dr. Graczyk said each building has a Student Assistance Program meeting weekly to review student attendance and engagement and identify students who are struggling. She said the staff and behavior specialists have created lists of resources to address mental health for staff and families to use. Additionally, any parent with a student who has special education services can request four days per week instruction. Those families should contact their building principal to start the process. If a parent has a concern at the primary level beyond academics, they can reach out to their school counselor or social worker who is part of the SAP team.
- Sarah Nelson, of Oakmoor Drive, asked how many teachers in the district are google certified and asked if that is something the district should ask them to do. She also asked how enrollment has decreased and if that is a concern and if the district has surveyed those families to find out why they have left. Dr. Aiken said the district is tracking enrollment throughout the year and looking at where those students have gone. He said the district hasn't lost many more families than in a typical year. There are families who leave but also families that come into the district. He said the district does have some teachers who are google certified trainers however, the district hasn't required it. Dr. O'Black said there are teachers who have gone through extensive training and serve as technical support staff members. The staff as a whole has gone above and beyond with professional development. The district contracted with Dr. Sheninger over the summer to work with teachers on virtual and hybrid pedagogy. Ms. Nelson asked if the iPads would continue to be a part of the curriculum. Dr. O'Black said the district has no intension of removing the 1:1 program in place now. Dr. Aiken said if there is a snow day this year, it will be an instructional day, however, it is important to balance not being on an iPad all day. Dr. Graczyk gave an overview of the historic enrollment numbers. The district has lost 51 students since the start of the school year which is only slightly higher than other years but not substantial based on the norm. Dr. Kwiatkowski asked about sharing resources with families. Dr. Graczyk said the department is working to consolidate all of the information onto one site to make it easier to find and access.
- Kira Luka, of Mary Ann Drive, gave a personal account of her challenges to schedule an in-person appointment with the school counselor at Burchfield due to scheduling conflicts. Dr. Graczyk said she would work with the counselor to address the problem.
- Maria Mehlhoff, of Kimle Drive, said her child needs to be in the classroom with her teacher. She shared some of the most recent COVID-19 data and numbers and pointed out how those numbers may not be entirely accurate due to testing methods. She said Fox Chapel has been in person for four days for the upper elementary and 5 days for the elementary and they are using the same numbers as Shaler Area. She said there is a petition going around to send students back five days. Parents are asking for the choice to do what is best for their child. Dr. Aiken said the district is moving in that direction. He said he appreciates her data and thoughts and is disappointed to hear her student is struggling.
- Ms. Nelson said it would be easier to reach out to school board members with better contact information listed on the website. She said their voice mailboxes are usually full. She also suggested adding a short biography of each board member to the website. Mr. Tunstall said it is something the board can look into doing and look at ways to make board members more available to the public.
- Dr. Kwiatkowski said that even if they are not all on the same page with everything, she thanked the parents for their time and for spending their evening with the school board.
- Mr. Tunstall added that there is nothing the board appreciates more than parent involvement.

After no further items were presented, final adjournment occurred at 9:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bethany Baker
Assistant Board Secretary