

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING
January 31, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT	MEMBERS ABSENT	ADMINISTRATION PRESENT
Dr. Archer		Dr. Smith, Superintendent
Dr. Corcoran		Mr. Decker, School Business Administrator
Mrs. DeForest		Mr. Reyes, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Gross		Mr. Franz, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Leach		
Mrs. James-Murad		
Mrs. Rhodes		
Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz		
Mrs. Woodcock Dettor		

Mrs. Rhodes called the Board of Education Special Meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. via Zoom.

**Approve Participating of School Athletes in Higher Risk
Sports of Basketball, Hockey and Cheerleading at the
Modified, Junior Varsity and Varsity Levels**

Dr. Smith started out the meeting with an explanation of Governor Cuomo's January 22nd announcement that higher risks sports in New York State would be allowed to start on February 1st as permitted by the local health department. He said the announcement directed that each district's Board of Education must approve each sport, each district must have a parent sign a consent form in order to the athlete to participate and each athlete must be tested weekly.

Dr. Smith said the three sports that the Board will be asked to approve are basketball, hockey and cheerleading. He said the Board will not be asked to approve wrestling, as the league has agreed it is best to consider this sport later in the spring, and indoor track, as it is not a higher risk sport. He said the District has received approval of the J-D plan from the district's physician, Dr. Nanavati. Dr. Smith also said that information on testing is vague, as details with the County have not been finalized.

Mr. Leach stated that he supports starting higher risk sports as he is not in favor of taking the decision to participate away from families and shared his positive experience with fall sports.

Dr. Corcoran asked if there will be tryouts and Dr. Smith responded yes, where limited spots are involved.

Mrs. James Murad stated that she believes the physical and mental wellbeing of students should be the first concern and that the benefits outweigh the risks. She said students are already playing higher risk sports at the club level and it becomes an issue that some parents can't afford that.

Mrs. Rhodes asked if we are looking at surrounding counties to see what they are doing. Dr. Smith responded he did not know. Mrs. James Murad stated that most counties are going forward with some parameters.

Max asked about where we were getting the percentage threshold and if the average infection rate rises above county number, would sports continue. Dr. Smith responded we would look to the County for advice.

Max asked if there could be monthly/bimonthly information sessions with Mr. Goodson and possibly amend the threshold based on percentages. Dr. Smith stated that we can make the guidance stricter, but not sure he would recommend that.

Dr. Archer asked about expectations and guidance for coaches as well as if we had the staff to support weekly testing of the athletes. Dr. Smith responded that Dr. Gupta assured us that she is confident our staff can do the testing. Dr. Archer asked if the framework for sports could be used as guidance for plans for opening arts programs.

Mrs. Rhodes asked if the new variant of COVID has been identified in CNY and what would be the plan if it was. Dr. Smith responded that he was not aware of any cases and there was not any specific guidance. He said any decisions would be made in partnership with the County, Department of Health, and the Superintendent.

Mrs. Rhodes asked about the parameters for an athlete that can't tolerate a mask. Dr. Smith responded they would need to have a doctor's note to the athletic director informing them of a medical condition.

Mr. Gross asked about testing and whether it would be PCR or rapid testing. Dr. Smith responded that rapid testing is what the County is widely using. He said a PCR test would be used with anyone showing symptoms.

Mr. Gross asked about anyone that doesn't follow the rules. Dr. Smith responded that in that case, the athlete would not be allowed to participate.

Mrs. Woodcock Dettor asked if there were any issues with the fall sports season. Dr. Smith responded that it went exceedingly well, there were no positive cases.

Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz asked if the numbers in the district are increasing or on the decline. Dr. Smith responded that there has only been one week of data since the last board meeting, but numbers have come down.

Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz asked if we could take out the attestation that we hold the County harmless.

Mrs. James Murad responded that this is the County trying to cover themselves. Mrs. Woodcock Dettor stated that there is an assumption of risk clause in everything we do. She said it is helpful to have it and would leave it there.

Mr. Leach stated that there are many legal provisions that are not enforceable.

Dr. Archer asked if there has been consideration to require athletes to be remote. Dr. Smith responded that we don't have the capability to require them to go fully remote. Mrs. DeForest stated that we did not require that for fall athletes or swimmers.

Mrs. Rhodes asked if there was a way to pod these athletes in schools to be able to contain the risk.

Dr. Smith stated that it is very difficult to pod athletes as everyone has such different schedules.

Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz said the sports mentioned were low to moderate risk. She stated that with what we are hearing about social emotional health of students, which the Board has been asking for support in since the beginning of the year, is this really about health or playing sports and to say it is an equity

issue is misleading. Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz asked if we were taking spectators off of the table. Dr. Smith responded that is still a point of discussion and league recommends we start slow. Mrs. DeForest stated that we can still watch these events through streaming and suggested a balance of senior athletes going into their final year of competition to be allowed to have families as spectators.

Mr. Leach asked if we need to decide that tonight and Dr. Smith stated the only item we need to decide tonight is the start of participation.

Dr. Archer asked about guidance relative to first aid on the coaches' part. Dr. Smith stated that this is not COVID specific training and that if an athlete needs first aid, the coaches will tend to them.

Mrs. DeForest said the Governor and the County have allowed high risk sports at this time and this is the hand we have been dealt. She shared her experience with her daughter in sports during the pandemic. She said that our district has exemplified good safety patterns and trusts that we can do the same moving forward.

Mr. Gross stated that this is an operational decision that normally would be in the power of the Superintendent to make.

Dr. Smith agreed as normally the Board does not authorize the start of sports and it is appropriate to expect him provide the Board with updates. He said he thinks the Board needs to authorize the startup of sports.

Mrs. Rhodes asked about a reference in the county plan about travel and how it is not allowed to any area designated as a red or orange zone. She said these zones don't exist anymore so will the plan be amended. Dr. Smith stated that his interpretation is that we adhere to the plan and only travel to contiguous counties, including no overnights and no eating in restaurants.

Mrs. DeForest asked if parents would be allowed to transport their students to contests if they so choose. Dr. Smith responded yes, that is an option and a waiver would need to be signed.

Max asked about the protocols in determining games possibly being unsafe and what role would students be able to play in that.

Dr. Smith responded that if students feel unsafe they should express that to a parent, coach, or athletic director.

Max asked, that since he cannot make an amendment, that a Board member make a motion to each sport that a mailer or some form of communication go to all students acknowledging the fact that higher risk sports participants will be in school with them and also that if the weekly test average for higher risk sports exceeds the seven day average of the county, that we immediately re-discuss higher risk sports at JD.

Mrs. Rhodes stated that each sport would be approved separately for all three levels (modified, junior varsity and varsity). Mrs. Rhodes asked for a motion and stated that if a Board member is amending anything from the JD athletic plan or the county recommendation in the motion that needs to be clearly stated.

Dr. Corcoran stated that she has respect for everyone and every topic on this Zoom tonight. She said she has not taken this topic lightly and as a lifelong athlete, she has lost sleep over this. She said that

she would never have wanted to make this decision but as a board member, she was elected to make decisions to benefit all students, athletes, musicians, scientists, math Olympians, everyone. She said, for those reasons, she has to vote no.

Mr. Gross moved and Mrs. James Murad seconded the motion to approve cheerleading at all levels with no amendment.

Motion carried (5-4-0). Dr. Archer, Dr. Corcoran, Mrs. Rhodes and Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz opposed.

Mrs. James Murad moved and Mrs. Woodcock Dettor seconded the motion to approve hockey at all levels with no amendment.

Motion carried (5-4-0). Dr. Archer, Dr. Corcoran, Mrs. Rhodes and Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz opposed.

Mrs. James Murad moved and Mrs. Woodcock Dettor seconded the motion to approve women's basketball at all levels with no amendment.

Motion carried (5-4-0). Dr. Archer, Dr. Corcoran, Mrs. Rhodes and Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz opposed.

Mrs. James Murad moved and Mrs. Woodcock Dettor seconded the motion to approve men's basketball at all levels with no amendment.

Motion carried (5-4-0). Dr. Archer, Dr. Corcoran, Mrs. Rhodes and Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz opposed.

Mrs. Rivera-Ortiz commented that our student representative asked us to modify these motions to make sure it was clearly communicated to our school community that they would be attending school with high risk sports athletes and none of the Board members actually honored that request.

Dr. Corcoran apologized as she thought the motion to amend would be made after the vote.

Dr. Smith stated that he appreciated the Board's consideration. He thanked Mr. Goodson, the athletic department, and all the coaches that helped develop these plans. He said the plans were made with the safety of our students in mind and he believes we will be able to maintain a safe learning and working environment for our students and staff who are not participating in sports. He said he is looking forward to the opening of arts and other activities for students and mostly looking forward to getting students back full time, as soon as possible.

Mrs. Rhodes thanked everyone that worked on creating the plans. She said she hopes that Dr. Smith and the communications person are able to use some of the comments and conversations to communicate with families about the reopening of sports.

Lastly, Mrs. Rhodes addressed students and asked them to avail themselves to mental health support at school. She suggested any student needing help reach out to teachers, coaches, or counseling staff. She also asked anyone who has friends that are struggling, to point them in the direction of the support as well.

At 5:09 p.m., Mr. Gross moved and Dr. Corcoran seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried (9-0-0).

Respectfully submitted,

Timothy Decker
Clerk of the Board

BOARD APPROVED: 2/8/21