

**KEWANEE COMM SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING FEBRUARY 15, 2022**

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL FOR A SPECIAL BOARD MEETING**

A Special Meeting of the Board of Kewanee Community Unit School District No. 229 was held in the Kewanee CUSD #229 Petersen Auditorium with President Johnson calling the Meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Roll call showed the following Members present: Stabler, Dev, DeBord, Christiansen, Steffen, Salisbury and Johnson. Superintendent Sullens and Recording Secretary H Hughes were also present. Staff and community members in attendance were R Lambert, T Stout, C Stout, K Stout, P Schneider, K Simms, T Simms, J Brandmeyer, A Murphy, C Burnett, P Johnson, A Hamrick, A Wyant, S Dev, D Frail, T Ramos, T Ramos, A Welsh, A Lucas, K Lucas, R Baney, J Bryan, M Tumbleson, S Juarez, M Maxon, J Maxon, G Bradley, S Schwickerath, A Johnson, F McVicker, M Komnick, and J Komnick. J Russell was present reporting for the Kewanee Radio Station.

**II. Closed Session: (C) (11) PROBABLE LITIGATION**

At 6:01 pm Member Christiansen seconded a motion made by Member Steffen to enter into Closed Session to consider (C) (11) Probable Litigation \* 5ILCS 120/2 Open Meetings The School Code of Illinois/2020. Voice roll vote showed all present Members voting aye. The motion carried.

At 6:22 pm Member Stabler seconded a motion made by Member Steffen to adjourn the Closed Session meeting. A voice roll call was heard with all present Members voting aye. There were no nay votes. The motion carried.

**III. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL FOR A SPECIAL BOARD MEETING**

President Johnson called the Special Meeting Open Session to order at 6:24pm. This Open Session continued in the KHS Petersen Auditorium. Roll call showed the following Board Members present: Stabler, Dev, DeBord, Christiansen, Salisbury, Steffen, and Johnson.

**IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG**

President Johnson asked the audience to stand, if able, and join the Board in saying the "Pledge of Allegiance" to the flag.

**V. DISCUSSION OF GOVERNOR PRITZKER'S COVID-19 EXECUTIVE ORDERS EMERGENCY RULES ISSUED BY THE IDPH, GUIDANCE FROM THE ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, AND THE DISTRICT'S RETURN TO LEARN PLAN.**

**DISCUSSION OF JUDGE GRISCHOW'S TRO RELATING TO COVID-19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES.**

Dr. Sullens explained that the Circuit Court of Sangamon County ruled on COVID-19 mitigation case. Judge Grischow ruled in favor of plaintiffs with a footnote that the ruling should apply across the state. But her ruling doesn't apply to Henry County. This ruling is being appealed in the 4<sup>th</sup> District Appellate Court. The ruling from the 4<sup>th</sup> District Appellate Court will effect Henry County. An expedited hearing is expected; therefore, a ruling is expected by the end of the week. Some districts in the area have decided to go along with the Circuit Court ruling. The current executive order on masks is in effect until March 5<sup>th</sup>.

The District has a *RETURN TO LEARN PLAN* that was presented and approved in August. Before the Board approved the plan, the Governor issued an Executive Order requiring masks in schools. This Executive Order overrode the District's plan. The current plan is states that masks would be required for those not fully vaccinated. It is also stated that masks will be worn by drivers and students on

buses regardless of vaccination status. Masks are also required in Driver's Education cars by instructors and students regardless of vaccination status. No matter what happens with the rulings on the Executive Orders and if masking goes away, masks will still be required on buses. Buses are covered by a Federal Order by the CDC. Dr. Sullens stated he wasn't sure if that order expired or a removal of the order would need to be passed. The *RETURN TO LEARN PLAN* was created by a group of teachers and administrators. The committee will be meeting again tomorrow to review the plan. Dr. Sullens stated that it is believed that the Illinois Supreme Court will refuse to hear an appeal from either side. Therefore, what the Appellate Court rules will stand. He said the District will abide by the Appellate Court Ruling.

## **VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Pam Schneider, Central 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, thanked the Board and Dr. Sullens for having the meeting. At the beginning of the pandemic she thought like everyone else that she was getting an extended spring break. But as the pandemic continued Schneider stated that her mental health struggled. She stated she feels for her students who started the pandemic as 9 year olds. They have dealt with having their temperature taken prior to entering the building daily, only attending school in person two days per week, and the inability of using sports equipment in PE or at recess. Schneider stated that she has watched her students' mental health deteriorate. She stated that at the beginning of the pandemic she lived in fear and followed all of the suggestions. She says she no longer wants to do that. Schneider stated that the students have lost so much. She said that each day we force the kids to wear masks we are stealing time for them to learn necessary life skills. She stated that she was begging the Board to rethink the mandate on mask wearing. She feels it is time to show our students that we value their needs and feelings.

Jaci Brandmeyer, parent, wanted to discuss why masks should be optional. She stated that not often you get to choose what school your child attends, generally that is based on your address. She chose to send her son to Kewanee's Pre-K program. The program was worth sending him across town for. As the mother of a cancer survivor, she is familiar with masks. She has worn them personally and professionally for 18 years. Brandmeyer stated that she knows how effective N95s are at preventing infections. But stated that the children are not wearing N95s and the masks they are wearing are not making a difference. Therefore, she will fight for her children's choice. They deserve to "have a normal life, an unmasked life that their sister did not get." She stated that a top infectious scientist at the NIH stated last week that there were no good studies to prove the efficacy of masks. Brandmeyer stated that children grow and learn via social emotional development. There are many studies on masking and social emotional delays. She stated her son is 5 years old and struggles to read social cues. Social cues are essential to children's development. She stated that the Governor is removing mandates with the exception of schools and nursing homes. She stated that it is absurd to mask children at school because they are with the same people outside of school without masks. Brandmeyer stated that the JCAR vote suspended the mask mandate and it is time for Kewanee to do the same.

Michael Tumbleson, parent, thanked the Board for their time. He stated that his child has children's asthma and has a hard time wearing a mask. He stated that he has done research and many doctors say the masks are "like having a chain link fence keeping mosquitos out."

He stated he knows Mr. DeBord and Dr. Johnson from outside their roles as Board members. Tumbleson stated that “he isn’t against any of you” and has previously asked Dr. Johnson when the next election is because he wants to be on the Board and make a difference. He stated that he is asking the Board to do what the parents can’t. He asked the Board to please unmask the kids. He understands that the Board has attorneys and that people can get sue happy. He stated that he doesn’t think COVID isn’t real and that people have died from it. But 25-50,000 people die every year from the flu. He asked again for the Board to unmask the kids.

Tim Simms, parent, stated that he understands that the Board feels like they are doing the right thing and following orders but that is the job of public health officials. He stated that he served in the military for quite a few years for the freedom of this country and the people in it. But now he has to tell his kids that laws there to protect them are “pretty much meaningless.” He stated that he has watched basketball games and wrestling meets in person and online. At some of the games people were telling people to put on their masks but a doctor and his wife in attendance weren’t required to. Some games the lower bleachers were not out and athletes were spread out in chairs but not every game. He questioned why rules were enforced some days but not others. Simms stated that one of his children is immunocompromised and that he was born with half a heart. His normal oxygen levels are a lot lower than a normal person. Lower oxygen levels have side effects of headaches and interfere with heart and brain function. The mask mandate doesn’t allow us to do as we see fit for our children. If masks are doing what you think they should, there should be no concern if you choose to keep wearing them. He said he was impressed by the faculty and students’ support prior to his son’s last open heart surgery. He hopes for the same support and empathy from the District now in the form of respecting his and other parents’ decisions in regards to masking students. He stated the school preaches about keeping kids safe. His daughter was in the high school’s musical and he was told that testing had been setup for the cast and that no one had showed up. He felt it should be mandatory. If students can be tested to stay in school, then why can’t they be required for the musical also. He stated that the director of the musical posted that testing wasn’t required. She also posted that if students tested positive they were out of the production and if that happened the show was “sunk.” Therefore, students didn’t get tested. On Monday after the production, he stated he received a message that several participants had tested positive. He wondered how many people were exposed that didn’t need to be. Finally, he said that hundreds of schools have already removed mask mandates and no matter the result of the ruling they aren’t going back. “It is time to move on and let parents parent their kids and leave education up to the school system. When we had kids that is what we signed up for, to protect them.”

Sonia Juarez, parent, thanked the Board for their time. She stated that Representative Mike Halpin said that the IDPH failed to clearly state if the rule is to apply to all K-12 schools or just those schools and Districts not party to the legal action. It left parents and students looking to their leaders. By unmasking our kids says we are trying to protect you but you are seen and heard. She stated that the Board “couldn’t fail us by giving us a choice.” She said her children have the choice to attend Kewanee, Wethersfield, or Visitation but they attend Kewanee. She stated that she would hate to remove them because they aren’t seen, heard, or valued because they aren’t able to choose what’s best for them and their home. Juarez ended with “we are seeking our leaders to see us, hear us, and give us a choice.”

Felicia McVicker, parent, stated that her 14-year-old is a bad asthmatic. He has four inhalers and other medication for his asthma. She stated that he it was very difficult for her child to breathe while wearing a mask. He already struggles to walk up stairs and he has to wear a mask. She stated that many times the school has called to say her son needed a breathing treatment because he can't breathe. In her opinion, masks should be optional. McVicker stated that she is also a mother to twins who were born early and were in the NICU. They are currently on the border of having asthma as well and masks are difficult for them. Her child in pre-k doesn't understand faces that people make. Her daughter only knows people in masks. She feels students are unable to learn social cues while wearing masks.

McVicker stated that at her job she is required to wear a mask and doesn't feel like she gets a choice. She was required to be vaccinated to keep her job. But she feels masks should be optional everywhere. In her opinion, you should wear a mask if you want but it shouldn't be required.

Christie Burnett, parent, stated that she had a kindergartener and first grader. She wanted to request that masks be made optional on behalf of her, her children, and other parents. She stated that it has been made clear that masks don't work. She and her children have faithfully worn a mask at work and school for the last two years. But her family has still contracted COVID twice and been quarantined multiple times. She stated that the masks are not preventing us from contracting COVID. Burnett said that her children have spent the first years of their education with masks. Stating her children don't know what their teachers look like without masks. She stated they have seen children from their classrooms, kids that they see every day and they don't recognize them without a mask. She stated that if you feel unsafe and want to wear a mask you should wear it. She isn't asking to take that away from anyone. She stated she is asking for a choice and to go back to a normal life without masks.

President Johnson asked for any additional comments from the public.

Jaci Brandmeyer requested to ask a question.

President Johnson stated that this time was for comments. The Board was not taking questions at this time.

Brandmeyer then commented she didn't understand why there wasn't a vote. She also asked why the Board was basing potential rules off of assumptions.

Dr. Sullens stated that there was no vote because the Board was waiting for the Appellate Court to rule. He also stated that we are currently under Executive Order 2022-05 until March 5<sup>th</sup>. Sullens stated that Appellate Court ruling will have a direct bearing on us. The fallback is the District's *RETURN TO LEARN PLAN*. That plan states that staff and students are to wear masks unless vaccinated. A group of teachers and administrators are reviewing the plan tomorrow. The group will come back with a recommendation at next Tuesday's Board meeting.

President Johnson stated the situation continues to evolve and guidance is changing. He said he expects more information and changes coming soon. President Johnson stated that there will be a meeting next Tuesday night. The agenda will have action items and an opportunity for public

comments.

Dr. Sullens stated that the Board Meeting begins at 6:00 p.m., the Board then will go into Closed Session. The public portion of the meeting does not begin until 7:30 p.m.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

At 7:10 pm President Johnson called for a motion for Adjournment. Member Steffen made a motion to approve. Member Salisbury seconded the motion. A voice vote was heard with all present members voting aye. There were no nay votes heard. The motion carried.

---

**JEFF JOHNSON, PRESIDENT**

**JON DEBORD, SECRETARY**