



MEETING NOTES

Meeting Notes are not official until voted on by the Board of Education at its following Regular Meeting.

1. The meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. Members present: Mark Abate, Paul Lambert, Nadia Long, Brian Perry, and Lisa Whiting
3. Everyone recited the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. The Board of Education adopted the agenda as submitted.
5. Presentations – Social Emotional
 - a. Dr. Colette Dollarhide, Dr. Brett Zyromski, The Ohio State University

The impact of COVID-19 on our students and teachers is important. We recognize that you are looking at this issue more closely because you are concerned and have your students' best interests at heart. Although there are many people collecting data, there is limited, detailed research available at this time. Some of the information we will share this evening has been pulled from similar conditions that students have faced in the past to give you a basic idea of what today's students are facing. We looked at the risks and implications of remote and in-person educational strategies.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting the general public's mental health, resulting in tension, anxiety, fear, psychological disorders such as acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicide. It is estimated that up to 80% (4 of 5) of those affected by a crisis will have mild distress, 20% (1 in 5) to 40% (2 of every 5) will experience a psychological disorder in the medium-term, and up to 5% may experience a long-term problem. For example, in a classroom of 20 students, 4 to 8 students may have significant psychological disorders in the medium-term. They will experience more stress, anxiety, and depression than usual.

If applied to HCS overall enrollment data (n=16,642), that means 13,313 students are experiencing mild distress, 3,328 to 6,657 students are experiencing psychological distress, and 832 students may experience long-term issues.

These are real lives; these are our kids. We have worked with Dr. Marschhausen on a few projects, and we love the way you perceive and take care of your students.

One of the critical trends we noticed is that inequity gaps are only increased during this time. Individuals routinely disadvantaged by social injustice (low SES, disabilities, racial minorities) are most affected. For example, studies indicate the needs of Hispanic/Latinx children are not being met.

How kids react to these stressors varies by age. Younger children may demonstrate signs of regression, such as:

- Wetting the bed
- Temper tantrums
- The battle over food or bedtime
- Increase fear or anxiety when separating from parent/family figures.

Older kids that have more contextual understanding, like middle schoolers and high schoolers, may demonstrate other signs, such as:

- Increased moodiness, anger, or short temper
- Persistently on edge
- Fear for the health of people close to them, such as parents or grandparents.

Our goal was to contextualize this information in a meaningful way relative to the potential challenges and opportunities represented in remote instruction and in-person instruction.

Remote Instruction

Nearly all (85.7%) parents reported changes in their child’s emotional state during school closures and lockdown. The most common symptoms include difficulty concentrating, boredom, irritability, restlessness, and nervousness. These symptoms are not just manifested in the remote classroom environment but also generalized by how they act with their loved-ones during the non-classroom time.

One of our biggest concerns is our children’s safety. When there is more stress and children are not in regular contact with mandated-reporters, the likelihood of violence in the home is increased. We felt it was important to recognize the quote from UNICEF (box). This is true of home insecurity and food insecurity. Many school districts have done tremendous work to ensure that children and families have access to food. These kinds of efforts are very, very important.

“Lockdowns, school closures and movement restrictions have left far too many children stuck with their abusers, without the safe space that school would normally offer. It is urgent to scale up efforts to protect children during these times and beyond.”

- Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF

Working parents have reported incredible strain on their time, resources, and ability to manage the day-to-day needs of parenting and homeschooling. Parents are not performing as well as teachers, and we know lots of parents are working and cannot help with learning. My sister is a fifth-grade teacher in Tucson, Arizona. She reports that over half of her students are home alone, and their behavior during the Zoom classroom experience does not revolve around learning.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) also have highlighted issues of access and opportunity. Their data show that 14% of children ages 3-18 don’t have internet access at home. We know that learning requires conversation, trust, a collaborative and safe environment, and none of those things are guaranteed with remote instruction. NCES reports that more than nine million school children face difficulty completing assignments online.

In numerous online surveys since March, teachers have consistently indicated they were not prepared to teach online. It is tough for them to feel like they are reaching their students. A significant percentage of their students did not even log in to complete assignments. Teachers in high-poverty schools say they taught less new material. Teachers are feeling non-effective.

These extraordinary circumstances have also created unique opportunities to:

- Conduct regular holistic checks of families: stress, basic needs, mental health
- Provide evening workshops for parents to help their kids (e.g., quadratic equations)
- Provide computers and hotspots in the district (e.g., parking lots, libraries)
- Provide teachers with more support for online instruction.

In-Person Instruction

We acknowledge that you all are already addressing the challenges of in-person instruction. The following are challenges taken straight from the CDC:

- Impeding the spread of COVID-19
- Developing a plan to conduct contact tracing in the event of positive cases
- Using school or community spaces to increase social distancing strategies within the classrooms
- Logistics of creating social distance in classrooms
- Educating parent and caregivers about how to monitor for and respond to symptoms of COVID-19 at home
- Logistics of cleaning classroom spaces
- Integrating mitigation strategies into co-curricular and extracurricular activities

Strategies employed by school districts in China, Denmark, Norway, Singapore, and Taiwan when reopening schools:

- Requiring temperature checks
- Reduce class sizes, increase physical distance, creating defined groups of students (cohorts)
- Staggering attendance, start and stop times, alternate shifts

We know that HCSD has also implemented these strategies.

Impact of these strategies on transmission rates:

- Denmark had a slight increase in students 2-12 years old when they reopened schools, followed by steady declines for kids between ages 1-19 years old.
- Israel experienced a surge of new cases, but it is unclear what caused the increases and what mitigation the schools had implemented.
- Texas (summer 2020) reported a surge of 1300 cases in childcare centers, with staff diagnosed twice as often as children.
- Computer simulations suggest if community rates are high, school transmission rates will be increased. If community rates are low, the potential for transmission through schools is low.

Research around infections and transmission in children is still emerging. It is not yet clear whether children are as susceptible to COVID-19 as adults or if they transmit the virus as easily

as adults. However, recent research suggests children carry the same or higher viral loads as adults and that they may spread it just as easily. The actual incidence of infection in children is unknown due to a lack of testing and prioritization of services for adults and others at high risk.

These extraordinary circumstances have created unique opportunities to:

- Be intentional about holistic support for our students and families
- Increase communication between staff, district leaders, families, and community resources
- Focus on closing equity gaps for our underserved populations
- Focus on enhancing our community partnerships to provide services to our families in poverty
- Celebrate the role of teachers and schools in the development of the whole child, not just academic achievement
- Focus on disparities in educational outcomes and unpack where they are in our schools and our communities.

Mr. Perry asked how much of an impact that hybrid has compared to in-person instruction. All of the research we found was comparing remote to in-person instruction. We don't fully know what the effect of hybrid instruction will be. We also have not seen a surge of cases in any school districts that have moved to a hybrid instructional mode. We believe the mitigation efforts for hybrid attendance have been relatively successful.

Dr. Marschhausen asked for their thoughts about the challenges we see with social-emotional isolation in remote compared to hybrid. Is there any research that shows that some school is better than remote? We have not seen anything in the literature that addresses your question. What I have seen is anecdotal. I have talked with many educators and school counselors who say that the contact in hybrid helps kids cope better. We know that once students reach the middle school level in a normal environment, they are more separated from their parents socially and emotionally and connecting to their peers. This normal social interaction continues into high school. The normal developmental evolution of our kids is the need for social connectedness. For my sister's middle school and high school students, it was worth the risk of reconnecting in extracurricular activities with their peers in a safe, intentional way because the kids were hurting at home. Even though we don't have any research, it seems that connecting even just a few times per week can be life-changing for our kids.

Mr. Lambert commented that it seems that the decision before us (Board, administration, and parents) is when the risk to staff and student health becomes low enough that it is less than the risk of harm to students not being in school? I appreciate all of the information and correlations you have provided us. Have you had any conversations with your peers in the biology department about how to mitigate the risks? We wish the biologists had better information. At this time, the information we get from the CDC is as good as it gets and is changing as we go along. We are waiting for the biologists to tell us the best and most accurate mitigation protocols. From their perspective, this virus has been around for only nine months, which is a relatively short time to identify causation.

b. Jeff Williams, Elementary School Counselor, Avery Elementary

What we are seeing falls very much in line with what Dr. Dollarhide and Dr. Zyromski found in their research. Before COVID-19 (*beginning of 2019-2020 school year*), we saw more social concerns, interpersonal struggles, and behavioral concerns. So far this school year, our data shows there is a significant increase in anxiety, emotional regulation struggles, adjustment to the school year, family concerns, self-esteem and self-worth, and trauma (shared by families). The issues we see this school year are significantly different than the start of last school year.

c. Cori Schulte, Guidance Counselor, Darby High School

This school year, Darby HS has experienced one suicide completion, a suicide attempt, and several students hospitalized who were showing suicide ideation. We (*secondary guidance counselors*) believe we have a lot of students “flying under the radar.” Since we don’t see students every day, it’s challenging to notice students who are beginning to struggle. Even though teachers have only half of their students each day, they are overwhelmed with balancing the student’s curriculum requirements with their social well-being or the signs a student is beginning to suffer from anxiety or depression. One reason they don’t seem to observe students’ emotional issues may be due to everyone wearing masks. Typically, teachers communicate with us (guidance counselors) about their students’ needs, but these conversations are just not happening right now.

Some students did not get into the Online Academy and are not coming to school on their designated in-school days because they don’t feel comfortable coming to school. We are doing our best to reach these students and help them make academic progress even though they are doing only remote/online assignments. Another factor is the student’s sleep schedules are off, so they struggle to be attentive while learning at home. We have increased failures for the first quarter both in the Online Academy and hybrid instructional modes. I believe the students lack the motivation to get their work done on days they are not in school.

I have noticed that students involved in extracurricular activities are doing better than those who are not. I believe spending time with their peers makes a big difference.

Mr. Abate commented that the Board is aware that social-emotional well-being is essential. It’s very challenging to give our kids all of the support they need while making sure we are keeping them as safe as possible (*masks, social distancing, etc.*) during this pandemic.

Mr. Williams added that some school is better than no school because our kids thrive in a routine. The collaboration effort and working with families has been increased tenfold. We have so many insecurities (*food, income*), so building trust and rapport with parents has been essential to our student success. At the elementary level, we have many people to advocate for our students, but when we have limited interaction with them, we have limited opportunities to support their needs. As an example, our referral rate for Franklin County Children Services is down significantly. We are trying to get creative to find ways to meet the immediate needs of our students. We need to keep in mind that every child has now experienced an adverse (traumatic) event.

Ms. Whiting expressed her concern with the increase in suicide ideation and attempts and asked how we can help you with this situation. Is there something we can do right now to help you reach the students who are struggling? Mrs. Schultz responded that the biggest challenge right now is finding outlets for these students. Students have said they do not want to Zoom an individual or group counseling session. They believe it is ineffective and are requesting some kind of group sessions for support. We could use Syntero’s services, but a remote offering will not be well attended. Our students are missing interaction with their peers.

Mr. Lambert noted a couple of points – (1) more failures in the first quarter than we’ve seen before, and (2) teachers not able to be as attentive to students’ mental state because of the amount of curriculum during the in-class day. At some point in our history, America decided that we would have an “assembly line” type of school system – students completing one grade level each school year – and expecting most students to operate at this level. I’m wondering if we need to change our expectations and slow down the “assembly line” pace during this difficult time.

6. The Board of Education approved item E1 through E2, consisting of certified and classified personnel matters. You can find the complete list of personnel matters as an attachment to the Minutes.
7. The Board of Education adopted the following policies:
 - a. AC – Nondiscrimination
 - b. ACA - Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex (**New Policy**)
 - c. ACAA – Sexual Harassment (**New Policy**)
 - d. ACAA-R – Sexual Harassment Grievance Process (**New Regulation**)
 - e. DFA - Investments
 - f. GCPD – Suspension and Termination of Professional Staff Members
 - g. GDPD – Suspension, Demotion and Termination of Support Staff Members
 - h. JED – Student Absences and Excuses
 - i. JEGA – Permanent Exclusion
 - j. JFCF – Hazing and Bullying
 - k. JFCF-R – Hazing and Bullying
 - l. JG – Student Discipline
 - m. JGD – Student Suspension
 - n. JGDA – Emergency Removal of a Student
 - o. JGE – Student Expulsion
 - p. KLD – Public Complaints about District Personnel

Mr. Lambert requested that Policy ACAA-R be submitted for the next review committee meeting. We also now have our policies published through BoardDocs, which makes our policies even more accessible.

8. The Board of Education approved the five-year forecast.

Mr. Wilson reminded everyone that Ohio Revised Code requires school districts to complete a five-year forecast each year by November 30, with a revised forecast to be completed by May 31.

Forecasted General Fund Revenues by Source

In 2021, we have \$145+ million in local revenue, with a compounded annual growth rate of our total revenues of 1.43%. Local revenue will grow to \$152 million in 2025, with most of this being property tax revenue. We receive approximately \$136.7 million of property tax revenue – \$125 million in real estate tax and \$11.2 million in public utility personal property tax. The majority of the other local revenue is payments in lieu of taxes of over \$6 million. The \$8.7 million balance is interest income, athletic participation fees, building rental fees, and some other miscellaneous categories. The state revenue is our school foundation dollars, roughly \$50.4 million in 2021, and reimbursement for property tax rollback for homeowners and homestead exemption of \$12.3 million. I am projecting a 2.07% compounded annual growth rate for state revenue that will return to the pre-COVID-19 rate by 2024. 70% of our income is from local sources, with 30% coming from the state.

General Fund Expenditures by Object

As you know, we are a labor-intensive organization with 85% of our expenses going to salaries/wages and benefits (*62% and 23%, respectively*). This is average for our district as well as other school districts in the state. The overall compounded annual growth rate for this period (*2021-2025*) is 3.67%. Salaries are projected to grow by a compounded annual growth rate of 4%. This includes additional staffing at the cost of \$400,000 annually, savings and certified retirements of \$300,000 annually, annual 2% cost of living increases, and step increases with an average cost of 2%. This also includes eliminating professional option days (*cost of \$500,000*) in the current fiscal year with their return in the fiscal year 2024. Benefits are projected to increase at a compounded annual growth rate of 4.4%. Roughly \$20 million of the benefits is pension-related, which is a percentage of salaries (*meaning this cost grows at the same rate as salaries*). \$26 million is for medical benefits with an 8% increase in 2021 and a 4-5% increase annually for 2022 – 2025.

Purchased services are projected to grow by a compounded annual growth rate of 2%. They include the cost of utilities (Under \$3 million), payments to charter schools (\$2.5 million), special education scholarships (\$1.9 million), other schools educating special education students (\$2.75 million), college credit plus (\$638,000), and contracted transportation (\$600,000+).

Supplies and materials are projected to grow by a compounded annual growth rate of 1.6%. This includes educational supplies, fuel for school buses and maintenance vehicles, office supplies, and parts to maintain vehicles and buildings (\$4.1 million). All other expenditure categories, including capital outlay, are much smaller parts of the budget.

Revenue Over/(Under) Expenditures

In 2018, our revenue was significantly over expenditures. 2018 is the first full year we collected the 2016 operating levy. This slope is typical for our district. The majority of operating levies do not grow with inflation. We see some new property tax revenue from new growth in real estate and utility personal property taxes. As I mentioned earlier, our overall compounded annual growth rate for revenue is 1.43%, and our compounded annual growth rate for expenditures is 3.67%.

Fortunately, before COVID-19, we were conservative with our spending and built a cash reserve that has helped us get us through this pandemic. This reserve allows us to stay off the ballot this year and will enable us to consider our options.

Revenue Assumption Risks

- At the moment, there is no state school funding formula. There is talk in the legislature that we will have a new funding formula by the end of 2020. I believe this will be beneficial for our district over the long run, but the current problem is that the state revenues will probably not fully fund the formula. I have not seen a simulation of the formula, which creates a lot of uncertainty with one of our larger revenue streams.
- Roughly 66% of our revenues are local property taxes. Residential and commercial collection rates right now are currently doing very well. However, it is pretty easy to see a variance of over 1%, and at over \$136 million in tax revenue, a 1% variance means a fluctuation of over \$1.3 million.

Expenditure Assumption Risks

- The cost of the college credit plus program is now at \$680,000. I believe the growth rate will slow from the fast pace it has had, but we are certainly keeping an eye on this.
- The special education private placements at \$2.75 million are growing faster than most of our costs, so this will continue to be a concern.
- Health insurance is such a significant expenditure that it will always be listed at a risk we need to watch. With our insurance committee's help, we have taken steps to mitigate the risk, but it is one of our largest expenditures with a good deal of volatility.

As always, this forecast predicts future events based on assumptions as we currently believe them to be. This is certainly not written in stone, and I'll be back with a revision in May as required by law.

Mr. Lambert made the following statement:

The fundamental economic issue for our District is that our expenses are forecasted to increase at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 3.7% while our revenue is forecasted to grow at 1.4%.

This isn't a new or unexpected phenomenon. We know that Compensation and Benefits consume an ever-increasing proportion of our total operating expenses, reaching nearly 87% by FY25. All of our other expenditures combined grow at less than 1% per year.

Depending on the condition of Ohio's economy and the political winds in the Statehouse, some of this structural gap may be filled by State Funding. Our State Formula Funding has grown well over the recent years, but we also need to remember that in times of a weak economy, the rate of State Funding growth can flatten, and even go negative, as happened in FY11 to FY13.

Also, remember that the State took away most of the Personal Property Tax (PPT) revenue stream, which was as high as \$16 million in FY2005. This elimination of PPT has undoubtedly played a big part in making Ohio attractive for corporations in the distribution and data center businesses. Still, few school districts will have a chance to break even on that exchange. We might be one of them, but not yet.

And so, most of the gap between our 1.4% revenue growth and our 3.7% expense growth has to be filled with local revenue sources. To date, it has been accomplished by increasing the real estate property tax rates, with the voters' approval. While many in the "public school business" lament the existence of HB920 and its mechanism, which prevents property taxes from increasing automatically with property values, I've said for 15 years that I believe HB920 is a good thing because it forces us, public officials, to make the case to the voters every time we want to increase spending.

We thought we'd be doing that right now – with a levy on the ballot for voters to consider. We made that commitment in 2016, saying we planned to be on the ballot in 2020 and every four years after that, and expecting the 2020 levy ask to be relatively small given the substantial cash balance we've been able to accumulate through a mixture of a healthy economy and spending discipline.

COVID-19 made that an unwise move. Fortunately, that substantial cash balance also allows us to delay the levy request for a year and maybe more. But the longer we wait, the more of the cash reserves we'll consume. When that inevitable levy request does appear on the ballot, it will almost surely need be larger than it would have been this year and will have to be passed if we want to avoid layoffs, larger class sizes, and reduced programs and services.

Dr. Marschhausen added that we could wait until the calendar year 2022 (the fiscal year 2023) before going on the ballot. This would mean the 2016 levy was extended to six years. The Board's conversation would be whether to ask for a two-year levy to get us back on the presidential election cycle, ask for a larger enough amount to last for another six years, or ask for an incremental levy as suggested by Mr. Perry at previous meetings. There are many factors and options to consider. At this time, our administrative team needs to continue to be conservative with our spending.

Mr. Abate added that part of the conversation with the finance committee included the fact that shifted personnel into different roles so that we didn't need to spend more money on new hires. There could be some additional staffing needs as we move forward. As we heard earlier, we will need to continue to address our student's and staff's social-emotional needs as we move forward.

Mr. Lambert added that the state funding formulas suggested over the past several years creates "winners and losers." The losers always complain that they cannot do with less, so a mechanism is developed to make sure they don't lose too much. The state usually puts a cap on the "winners" to fund this mechanism, and we end up back in the same kind of funding formula we have now. No matter what new formula the state develops, we are not apt to get a more considerable amount of funding and may be lucky to get our current funding amount.

On the incremental levy, Mr. Lambert remembered the Board had a conversation several years ago. We didn't put an incremental levy on the ballot back then because we didn't feel we were ready for the challenge of educating the community about what it would mean. It is a significant communications effort.

9. Discussion Topics:

a. Spot Redistricting Elementary School Attendance Areas

As we look at our enrollment, I believe now is the time we have to look at spot redistricting. Unlike some of the challenging processes in the past, we are not adding a building. Our goal is to shift the population so that the buildings we have are balanced. We have asked Cooperative Strategies to take a look at the population we would need to shift to balance enrollment at all fourteen elementary buildings. We are not talking about a mass redistricting.

b. Safety Officer Discussion

Discussion tabled since Mr. McDonough was unable to attend this meeting.

c. COVID Update

Knowing what we know now, we may have been able to be closer to all-in in August or September than we are now. This is mostly because of community spread. Our numbers have been stable. We have cases every day of students or teachers, but we have yet to have a case traced back to school. I believe that masks and six feet of social distancing are keeping our kids safe. As you heard from the counselors, our students are doing better in hybrid than in eLearning.

I appreciate all of the conversations about what we should be doing to provide support to our students. We have had discussions about whether we should have intramural sports at our high schools. From a public health epidemiologist standpoint, the answer is a clear “no.” When you think about the risks for parents and students willing to take that risk, maybe we should have those teams. We will continue our conversations and looking for ways to provide opportunities to our students safely.

We are also having conversations about our partnership with Syntero. We have some concerns that Syntero’s counselors are only remote. We could bring a small group of students together in a media center with six feet of social distancing and masks to have some face-to-face counseling. We know that we have things we need to do better. We will continue to learn every day and address each issue.

d. Meeting Locations

We have had some conversations about the sterile environment we felt on the stage at Bradley High School. Typically, our intent as a Board is not to put ourselves higher than other people. One of the things I appreciate about the way we run our school district is our accessibility. We talked about holding our meetings at a middle school commons area to all be on the same level. This would feel more normal than in the past few meetings.

Mrs. Long also raised a question about having security at our Board meetings. The Hilliard Police can provide special duty officers for a fee. We must look out for the safety of everyone. Dr. Marschhausen will have a conversation with Chief Fisher.

e. Other issues as deemed important

10. At 8:32 p.m., the Board of Education caucused to executive session to consider the appointment, discipline, promotion, demotion, or compensation of a public employee or official, and negotiations. The Board will not take any action following executive session.