



BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

January 13, 2021 School Board Special Meeting

Mr. Osborne called the meeting to order in the RHS Auditorium.

➤ Superintendent's Report

Mr. John Sibeto reported: My report will provide an update regarding our response to COVID-19 and frame the agenda items before you tonight. Since the pandemic began, Reynolds' response has been informed by guidance from the Department of Education and Department of Health and our experience at the end of the last school year. These two sources informed our efforts to balance the health and safety of our community with the educational needs of our children.

Last year's experience made it clear that we could not continue to provide distance learning via educational packets and phone calls. The state guidance made it clear that additional government shutdowns and disruptions to in-person instruction were not going away this school year. So, with a focus on expanding our student's and staff's remote learning capabilities we rolled out the Chromebooks, google classroom, and live online learning platforms at the start of this school year.

On the whole, these efforts have been successful. Our students and staff have a skill set that didn't exist in Reynolds at this time last year. We are able to discuss returning to in-person instruction today because we know we can continue to provide an online option for students that wish to remain at home and when COVID interrupts our in-person learning the remainder of the year. Because of our efforts during the first semester, Reynolds students have the option to seamlessly transition between an online and in-person learning environment as their health and educational needs change. This resiliency was the goal. Carrying out the day-to-day tasks to get here has not been easy. Our families have become in-home tech support, sacrificed the comfort of a routine schedule, and navigated the frequent changes in pandemic guidance since March. Our teachers have learned to deliver instruction through face masks, social distancing, and computer screens. When we zoom out from the day-to-day it is these, sometimes painful experiences, that allow us to move forward with confidence tonight.

Tonight, we ask for your approval to return to in-person instruction. This change is recommended due to a recent update in guidance from the state. Last week, Mercer County completed its 10th consecutive week of substantial COVID-19 transmission. Until January 7, 2021, the Department of Health and Department of Education recommended that school districts in substantial transmission counties remain in full remote instruction. This recommendation did not include any exceptions or alternatives.

On January 7, 2021, the Department of Health and Department of Education revised this recommendation. The new guidelines recommend that schools provide in-person instruction at the elementary level and to targeted groups, even in substantial transmission counties. Targeted groups are defined as students that are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first time the guidelines recommend in-person instruction take place in a substantial transmission county.

After reviewing these guidelines, the administration believes that all of our students fit the guidelines' recommendations for returning to in-person instruction. The agenda item before you tonight asks for your approval to return all students K-12 to in-person instruction beginning January 19th. Families that wish to remain in the remote learning environment will continue to have the option to do so. To make sure we are still meeting the needs of those children, the agenda item proposes an altered weekly schedule. Under this schedule, in-person instruction will occur on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday each week. All students will remain home on Wednesday. Teachers will use Wednesday to connect directly with online students, while in-person students are completing work at home. This will also give our custodial and maintenance staff time to complete a deep cleaning of the buildings.

It is the administration's belief that our students that remain in the virtual environment or are subject to a quarantine order need some dedicated time with our teachers. These students will be transitioning from live-streamed classes to posted virtual lessons. We do not have the technology to deliver simultaneous instruction for in-person learners and at-home learners. The administration considered other options of early dismissals or late starts for other students but believed those options provided substantial disruption to schedules for transportation, students, and teachers.

The administration also examined the possibility of recommending a hybrid learning model. Under these models, students would receive less in-person instruction by attending school 2 or 3 days a week and participating in on-line instruction the remainder of the time. We believe those models do not provide solutions to our problems and result in less in-person instruction time. These two negative outcomes led us to recommend the proposal tonight.

Absent a new government order that requires us to shut down, the administration recommends remaining in in-person instruction under this schedule for the remainder of the school year. We also seek your approval to alter the District calendar to end the second grading period on January 22, 2021 instead of January 15, 2021. This additional week will provide the opportunity for students and staff to meet face-to-face before closing out the second nine weeks.

These decisions will come with challenges. According to the Secretary of Health's November 23, 2020 Order, all school districts that operate in a substantial transmission county must complete an attestation form. This form requires Districts to notify the Department of Education if they are delivering instruction in a fully remote environment or with in-person instruction. Districts that elect to provide in-person instruction must follow strict shutdown procedures when COVID cases are present in the school district.

Under these procedures, as few as two cases in a Reynolds building in a 14-day period will require us to shut down the impacted building for 3-7 days. If we encounter five or more cases, we must shut down the impacted building for 14 days. These time periods can be shortened if appropriate contact tracing and investigations can be completed sooner. However, in our experience, we have not received the promised assistance from the Department of Health to complete contact tracing in a timely manner.

We also have challenges even if COVID-19 cases do not make it inside the building. During our November in-person instruction, mandatory quarantine of confirmed cases and close contacts quickly consumed our staff. Despite our open job posting, the District still faces a shortage of substitute teachers and support staff. These mandatory quarantine periods may impact our ability to deliver in-person instruction. These interruptions can be minimized if our students and staff follow the requirements to wear a mask, wash their hands frequently, and complete the daily health screening tool before sending students to school each morning. The efforts from the first semester will make sure that when these interruptions occur, education will continue. This is the comfort we struggled to achieve.

Finally, we received an update regarding the distribution of the vaccine to our teachers and staff. The District is working with Sharon Regional to facilitate our staff's receipt of the initial vaccine dose over the next few weeks. This additional support will further solidify our ability to continue delivering consistent in-person instruction. Thank you for your consideration.

Mr. Jonathan Steele, Solicitor for the Reynolds SD reported on January 5, 2021, the District received reports that a staff member from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Center for Safe Schools was advising parents to file complaints against Reynolds due to the continuation of remote learning. This report was very concerning since the District was following the recommendations of the Department of Education by remaining in remote instruction while Mercer County was experiencing substantial community transmission.

As a result, Mr. Sibeto asked me to investigate the source of the advice and obtain feedback from the Department of Education. To do so, I communicated with the Department of Education's Office of General Counsel and the Director of the Office for Safe Schools. Both of these individuals promised to investigate the matter and get back to me.

In return, I received a letter from the Deputy Secretary of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Matthew Stem. This letter, which I have provided to you tonight, confirms that Reynolds was acting within the guidelines and recommendations of the Department of Education and Department of Health. Mr. Stem stressed that any statements to the contrary do not represent the position or viewpoint of PDE. Mr. Stem closed his letter by stating that the Department of Education "understands the challenges school districts face during these unprecedented times. Those acting in accordance with PDE's guidance should be commended for doing so."

It is my hope that the Department of Education has taken appropriate corrective action to make sure the employee does not issue similar advice in the future. My office will continue to monitor the situation and provide any appropriate updates.

➤ [Educational Programs/Student Activities](#)

- Revised the 2020-21 Reynolds SD School Calendar: Change the End of Second Nine-Week Grading Period from 01/15/2021 to 01/22/2021
- Approved Reynolds School District's Return to In-person Instruction, Except for Families Who Choose to Remain in Full Virtual Education, Effective 01/19/2021

➤ [Meeting Dates](#)

January 20, 2021

Reynolds School Board Regular Meeting – 6:00 PM - LGI

A public **Town Hall Meeting** followed the Special Meeting from 7:19 PM to 9:25 PM in the Auditorium of Reynolds Jr.-Sr. High School for the purpose of discussing Reynolds School District's return to in-person instruction vs. remote learning education. Several community and staff members attended. 15 people addressed the board and administrators and expressed their viewpoints as listed:

1. Ashley Kloos, Transfer, PA
2. Brian Redfoot, Greenville, PA
3. Jason DeJulia, Transfer, PA
4. Jeff Savchuk, Greenville, PA
5. Salena Roy, Fredonia, PA
6. Natasha Reino, Greenville, PA
7. Sheri Valimont, Fredonia, PA
8. Katie Mild – RES - Elementary Phys. Ed. Teacher
9. Jon Painter, Transfer, PA
10. Kayla Scelsi, Greenville, PA
11. Cori Abbott, Greenville, PA
12. Mason Stewart, Greenville, PA
13. Lenora Sewinsky, Greenville, PA
14. Erik Shafer, Greenville, PA
15. Dan Redfoot, Greenville, PA