

**Transcript of Board of Education Meeting
December 9, 2020**

Mr. Buono:

I would like to call the meeting to order, it is 7:00 P.M. All members are present. So with that, please rise and join me in The Pledge of Allegiance.

All:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and Justice for all.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you. Do we have student council? Do we have Katie or Ryan?

Mr. Simons:

I see Katie and Ryan.

Katie Asenbauer:

I think Ryan is trying to get on right now.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. I see you at the bottom of the screen. Yep. Hey Ryan, Katie, how are you guys doing?

Katie Asenbauer:

Good. How are you?

Mr. Buono:

Good.

Katie Asenbauer:

So we just got a couple of updates, today, We just finished our annual holiday decorating, so now Columbia is fully decked out through out the holidays and winter before, yeah, in this year before break and we are hoping to do more of those through out the winter, usually we do a Make a Wish Foundation collection in January, so we're planning on doing that, we're just waiting for some gear and now down to Ryan.

Mr. Buono:

Great.

Ryan:

Thank you. The apparel sale we just conducted has concluded and all the orders will be delivered before the 23rd. And on Saturday the 12th, we will be going Walmart and shop for adopt a family.

Mr. Buono:

Awesome. That's cool it looks great, coming in. Great job. Thanks for participating. So we won't see you until the next meeting probably in January. So you guys have a great holiday. Okay.

Katie Asenbauer:

Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Keep it up.

Ryan:

You too.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. Buono, can I-

Mr. Buono:

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Simons:

... ask the students on the student council, Katie and Ryan, can you hear me? This is Mr. Simons.

Katie Asenbauer:

Yeah.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. Buono and I meet before the board meetings and one of the things we discussed was the importance of all the activities that you're doing in the student council, particularly as we approach winter and we may not be able to have winter sports. One of the things we talked about is encouraging you as student leaders to reach out to the students and maybe work with Mr. Harkin and the administration and some of the faculty advisors of our clubs to see what we could do to promote this much participation and have our kids registering for some of the virtual clubs that are going on in the school. Is that something you can help us with?

Katie Asenbauer:

Definitely, I know, definitely on our social media we've been trying to get more of an outreach, just to different groups of people and I know a lot of clubs are starting to meet more regularly so we will definitely try to work on that.

Mr. Simons:

We appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Excellent. Thanks Katie, thanks Ryan. Those efforts will pay off and I think they'll keep our kids connected and their peers connected. So thanks a lot. Now moving on to, I will turn on over, Mr. Simons, do you want to take the lead on this one?

Mr. Simons:

Yes, I will. We have a very special presentation tonight and this is a tradition that has been established in the district, the Mary P. VanDerzee Special Educator of the Year award and under the coordination of Molly McGrath, who was our director at PPS over the last several years, past couple of years, she's worked very closely with two of our parents, Katherine Maciol and Michelle McDonald, who serve as chairs of an advisory group and support group for our students and our parents of students who are in our special education program. So Catherine Maciol and Michelle McDonald are here. We appreciate their attendance at the meeting to present this year's Mary P. VanDerzee Special Educator of the Year award. I will turn it over to Michelle and Katherine.

Katherine Maciol:

I'm unmuted now, right? Okay. Famous quotes of Zoom, right? Hi, good evening everybody. It's great to be back out with the board of education after having spent six years with you guys and I'm just so happy to see you and so happy to be here and also a real privilege to really still be involved with the school district and participating with my partner on this project, Michelle McDonald.

Katherine Maciol:

We are going to, I want to say a few words, along with Michelle. We have this all set for you and I will start and then we have a PowerPoint presentation to introduce this year's award. First of all, I'd like to recognize Molly McGrath and Kara Harrington, who are actually not included on the slide show that we have because they helped us prepare it but it's very important that we acknowledge them and their incredible hard work, with the department.

Katherine Maciol:

And they've just been awesome to work with and we're so happy to have them and we're acknowledging them as part of this presentation tonight. We're recognizing tonight, the recipient of the award this year, we're recognizing the entire Special Education Department. I get goosebumps when I say that and the reason that we chose the entire special education department because of their extra efforts, their dedication to our students who are receiving special education services, especially during the school closure between March and June and it would just be impossible to pick one because they're all incredible and I hope that many of them have joined us tonight on this call to hear this presentation. So Michelle.

Michelle McDonald:

Thank you. For our special education teachers and related service providers-

Michelle McDonald:

... above and beyond to continue to connect and support students and families in ways that we have never imagined possible.

Katherine Maciol:

The department insures students continue to make progress, virtually through Google meets, individual phone calls, tons of emails and an incredible amount of follow through to make sure that the students are continuing to be engaged during this challenging time.

Michelle McDonald:

The related service providers learned how to continue to provide mandated speech, OT, PT, and counseling sessions through teletherapy, which came with many new unique challenges.

Katherine Maciol:

School teams worked together in writing of the IEPs and attend each student's annual meeting via Google meet and there were a lot of them.

Michelle McDonald:

We can't thank these teachers and providers enough for their time, energy and countless hours spent with our students and families during this emergency closure.

Katherine Maciol:

Part of the presentation, we asked for some quotes from kids and parents and we did receive a small amount, but Michelle's going to share a couple and then I'm going to share a final one.

Michelle McDonald:

"Teachers make a huge difference when they care about the success of their students and they helped us through this difficult time."

Katherine Maciol:

And the quote that I received was simply, "I love them and they help us." Truly felt from the heart. With that, we're going to acknowledge the special educator of the year and begin with our show. Michelle McDonald.

Michelle McDonald:

Thank you Catherine. We have from Bell Top Elementary, our special education teachers, Stephanie Ferriero, John Rivera and Barbara Schielke.

Katherine Maciol:

From Donald P. Sutherland. We have Janet Guido, Alicia Appelbaum, Ashleigh McCoy and Jenna Horton.

Michelle McDonald:

From Genet Elementary special education teachers. We have Joan Gleason, Kim McKeown, Beth Swala Nagashima, Scott LaGoy, Katie Carlin and Elizabeth Corey.

Katherine Maciol:

From Green Meadow Elementary, we have Renee Fields, Sandra Bouyea, Vinny Farry, Colleen Reinstein, Diana Koch, Julia Caporta and Laura Cornell.

Michelle McDonald:

And from Red Mill Elementary special education teachers. We have Ashley Gunther, Amy Schermerhorn, Jennifer Valcik, Kara Horton and Paula Sobol.

Katherine Maciol:

From Goff Middle School, we gave Lalana DeMarco, Tammy Kirwin, Megan Lopez, Christine Zilgme, Karen Anderson-Green, Nancy Kroll, Nancy Garcia, Jen Vendlands, Mike McNamara, Paul Hoff, Lauren Crispino and Scott LaMora.

Michelle McDonald:

And at the high school, Columbia High School our special education teachers being acknowledged this evening include, Claire Chouinard, Darleen Morgan, Laura O'Brien, Jim Obermayer, Kyle Randall, Kate Peffers, Melinda Tracy, Sarah Noel, Tara Maney, Amy Cirincione, Julie Caporta, Lisa Johnas, Butch Hartnagle, Mary Lally, Craig Cavotta, and Rachel Toolan.

Katherine Maciol:

And our private school, Woodland Hills and Holy Spirit special education teacher is Tami Meek.

Michelle McDonald:

And our school psychologists, Maureen Singer, Susan Rys, Debbie Gonyea, Jamie Duesler, Bonnie Hagglove, Rocco Persico, Bennett Kelvin and Jennifer Sorensen Chase.

Katherine Maciol:

Our social workers, which is what I am, so they are close to my heart. ...Jaime Gibbs, Audra Di Bacco, Lois Rondeau, Tiffany Rinehimer, Karen Sheridan, Jamie Eggleston, Laurie Scaringe, Maria Fontaine and Teresa Petromelis. Trisha Petromelis, I'm sorry.

Michelle McDonald:

And our speech language therapists. Denise Boniface, Margaret LaHera, Kate Morrow, Jessica Tice, Carrie Leyhane, April Dolce, Tracy Santore Goodman, Audry June, Leanne Dombrowski and Allie Harling.

Katherine Maciol:

Our occupational therapists. Gwen Rudnick, Peggy Leger, Nikki Barmen and Denise Lyle.

Michelle McDonald:

And their physical therapists, Katherine Biel and Jean Patrick.

Katherine Maciol:

Congratulations everybody. And thank you for all your hard work, your support, your dedication to our students with disabilities and to their families and once again, Molly McGrath and Kara Harrington, thank you for your prodigal dedication and all that you do for our district. Thank you for having us.

Michelle McDonald:

Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

We want to thank Katherine and Michelle for their continued work with our special education department. I want to thank Molly and Kara as well for working so closely with our parents. I want to congratulate everyone who has been recognized tonight within our special education department. I can't think of a better idea than you had to nominate everyone within our ed department, so we so appreciate your involvement in the district and we recognize on behalf of the district, all the hard work among special education teachers and our related service providers. Thank you so much for presenting this at the meeting.

Katherine Maciol:

Thank you. Good night everyone.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks Catherine, thanks Michelle. Any other words board members or Molly or Kara, on what we have here? Go ahead Molly.

Ms. McGrath:

I just want to thank all the special education teachers and related service providers for attending tonight. Cara and I are biased, but we have a rock star department and they always go above and beyond for our students and families. Thank you so much.

Ms. Harrington:

And I also want to thank everybody for attending and it's just been amazing to work here since I started, I think towards the end of June. The staff is incredible and I'm impressed every day by the dedication they have to families, as well as the services they provide and the IEP's that their writing, so it's great. I love working here, so I'm really happy.

Mr. Buono:

Great. Thanks Kara, good to hear. I'm glad to have you. That's for sure. So if there's no other comments, I will move to the Public Forum. Again. Thank you to our special ed staff and department. It's one of the strongest departments we have and in East Greenbush, proud to have you guys represent us out there in the district. So the public forum...Residents, students, employees, and business representatives of the East Greenbush Central School District may address the Board on matters concerning programs and/or operations of the district, other than matters involving personnel. Members of the Board do not directly respond to citizen concerns during the Public Forum. If a response is appropriate either the President or Superintendent will contact the individual in the near future. Those persons wishing to address the Board will be recognized by the chair of the meeting and should state for the record their name and address, or affiliation with the District or business. While the Board does not wish to infringe upon free speech protections, it must be stressed that the "Visitors' Forum" is not deemed to be an "open forum". The Board president will conduct the forum for the orderly and efficient operation of Board business. In addition, any remarks which may be considered defamatory or stigmatizing are prohibited and will be declared out of order and since on the comment session, we do have our email set up as we have in the past. Ms. Wager is monitoring that. Is there any comments or-

Ms. Wager:

Yes, thank you Mr. Bruno, we have one email this evening from Kim Gettle, a parent of a kindergarten student. She is in support of returning the kindergarten students to school full-time and her question involves, she would like to know how the busing will work and if students will have the same seats every day.

Mr. Simons:

I'm going to speak to the decision that I'm going to recommend to the board regarding our study of options to bring back our kindergartners for more in-person instructional days. We're going to speak to that topic under the superintendent's report. I want to talk about some of the steps that we've taken to analyze that option, as well as the context that we're working in right now within our County and within our state. So I will answer that question directly, but I want to do it in the context of superintendent's report because I have some prepared remarks.

Ms. Wager:

Thank you. No other questions at this time.

Mr. Buono:

No other questions? We do have the second public forum later in the meeting so as you hear, those who are joining us virtually, if there's any other vocations you'd like to express, we have a public forum [inaudible 00:17:27] that you can email as well. With that, as Mr. Simon said, we do you have an update but before we get to that, let's go to, let's go back to the screen, Peter. I'll have the board forum and I'll start with those members present here. Mark anything for the board forum?

Mr. Mann:

No.

Mr. Buono:

All right, Jennifer? Massey? Just going to go around. Good. All right, Michele? Thumbs up. Did Mark, . Hey John, you good? All right. Deanna? We're good. Kathleen?

Ms. Curtin:

I do want to say congratulations to the special ed department and I did notice when they were reading all the names, that there were several names that I remembered from when my kids were there, but there were also several names that I recognized as people who graduated with my kids. So we have our alumni coming back and joining. So I was very excited to see that.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, Kathleen and Frank had to step out I believe, he can comment later. I just want to say that this meeting, it's been a while since we met, but we've seen what's happened in terms of the region, what's happened in terms of Governor's announcements with addressing issues with COVID and schools and the various issues that schools are facing coming back from Thanksgiving break and the challenge is that this is presenting to not only East Greenbush but also all the school districts and communities and families in the surrounding areas. So it's something that we have to take extremely seriously, we have to make sure that we're doing what's in the best interest of our students and staff and community families so they're safe, but also provide them the best education we can in these times. So there's a lot on the

agenda in terms of the opening data that we're seeing, things that are impacting finances and also talking about the budget today so, it's extraordinary.

Mr. Buono:

So I think that your input, board members will be important and community members hopefully, that you guys listening and securing the things that we're talking about that will impact our community going forward so I'll turn it over to Mr. Simons.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you Mr. Bruno. I want to spend a few minutes talking about the work that the district has been doing over the course of the last several weeks regarding the concerns of our parents, that we try to adjust our current hybrid program to provide more days of in-person learning for our youngest children. We have heard from our elementary parents since we reopened in September and throughout the fall that they advocate for more time with the students coming into school or in-person instruction. We did an analysis several weeks ago and determined that we did not have the classroom space to adhere to the social distancing guidelines of New York state to bring first graders through fifth graders into the schools.

Mr. Simons:

While we did have the space with some changes in class numbers, including student reassignments and staff reassignments to accommodate that option for kindergarten. However, at the time we were studying this option, the infection rate within Rensselaer County for COVID-19 cases was about 1.3% on a seven day rolling average. As we've been working logistically to try to put this option in place because nothing would make me happier as an educator to be able to provide five days of in person instruction for our children right now, really at all levels, the seven day rolling average in Rensselaer County as of the data that is available on the state's website today is now 4%. So just in a short period of time, we've gone from 1.3, 1.5%, seven day rolling average to 4%. In the capital region the seven day rolling average is 5.1% and in Albany County alone, it is 5.7%.

Mr. Simons:

So the rate of COVID cases is increasing pretty significantly within our region and within our state and we are in a situation now that is much different than what we were when we were hearing these concerns. We went forward over the last few weeks and logistically planned the implementation of bringing our students in five days a week in kindergarten, our principals, our kindergarten teachers, Mr. McHugh, myself, our central administration, our union worked together to put together a plan, which we had tentatively indicated that we could implement around December 14th, which is just a few days away.

Mr. Simons:

Unfortunately, the timing of this presents serious health concerns and operational concerns for our district. The community spread is occurring and it is impacting our schools, our students and our staff and the overall operations of the district, in fact, the recent daily announcements that schools, our neighborhood schools are shifting to full remote until either right before the holidays or after the holidays is an indicator of not only the increases in the number of cases, but it is impacting districts in terms of the number of students and the number of staff members who are being identified as contacts to a positive case.

Mr. Simons:

When we identify students and staff who have been exposed to a student who is positive. The fact of that is we have to quarantine those students and those faculty and staff members for 14 days and that is a factor that is causing the districts around us and they've potentially, at some point cause us to have to shift to full remote instruction.

Mr. Simons:

The reason is that we have teachers that are quarantined, bus drivers that become quarantined, teaching assistants, cafeteria monitors and another fact of that is that we don't have sufficient staff to cover our classes, to teach our classes and to, for example, operate the buses. Fortunately, thus far as of December 9th, we have been able to logistically manage this within our district but the number of students and the number of staff that are being affected by the rising COVID rates in terms of quarantine has significantly increased. One thing I want to point out is the distinction between the cases and the kids and the staff that are quarantined.

Mr. Simons:

Governor Cuomo himself brought it up that, in the newspaper, crediting schools for the good job we're doing managing the infection rates within our schools, the infection rate among public schools in New York state is markedly low compared to the overall infection rates within the state and within the region. We have not had one case today in which the contact tracing done in coordination with the department of health has indicated that a student or a staff member contracted COVID-19 within our schools, based on our conversations with the County department of health, students and staff are contracting COVID-19 from outside activities, family members, or small group gatherings. In fact, the department of health told us recently that approximately 70 to 75% of the COVID-19 cases that they are tracking now, which have resulted in quarantines are associated with small in home, inside gatherings. Very few, if any, associated with school.

Mr. Simons:

On the one hand, the good news is, our schools are doing a good job, protecting the students, protecting the staff and implementing the protocols. On the challenging side is the impact of the rising cases on the quarantine rates of our kids and our families. When students are quarantined, for example, we had another case today at the middle school that we just announced with a student, we had to go back and see the classrooms that that student was in, the number of students that were within proximity of about six feet for at least 10 minutes or more, the staff members that were in contact with someone who was infected and we have to contact all of those individuals and quarantine them for 14 days. That has had a serious effect on the overall operations of our schools. This is, likely to continue according to the experts in the state level and national level, at least through January.

Mr. Simons:

While I believe that we're doing a good job preventing kids from becoming infected and staff from becoming infected, I just don't feel at this time we should adjust the program and that is not something that I say lightly. I've weighed this over the course of the last two weeks as we've monitored the situation. I think bringing more students in at this time, into our classrooms and increasing the overall enrollment within our schools on a daily basis will facilitate more contacts among children and staff. More likelihood that someone within the school, maybe in school or on a school bus, who later on tests positive, may trigger additional students that need to be quarantined or additional staff that need to be

quarantined and potentially shut down our schools and force us to have to go full remote because we won't be able to operate the schools because we can't cover our classes and or staff our buses.

Mr. Simons:

There have been situations that have occurred, the weekend after Thanksgiving, there have been situations that occurred this week. We're hearing almost every other day an announcement from our district that there are additional student cases and or staff cases and I just don't think the timing is right to increase the number of children in our buildings.

Mr. Simons:

I know that that will come with some frustration, the decision will come with frustration and disappointment among our parents. I can tell you that I am frustrated and disappointed by it as well however I don't believe that it is the right thing to do at this time and I would hope the board would support my recommendation. It doesn't mean that after we get through the holidays and we assess the circumstances, what's happening within our region, we have a plan that's ready to go. We know what we will do regarding the class list. You know, what we would do regarding transportation, which we are able to have the capacity, the bus for kids and still have social distancing at that grade level. It's just not the right time to implement the plan and hopefully we could do it later in the year if the situation gets better.

Mr. Buono:

And welcome some comments board members, just recommendation regarding the situation right now. Jeff.

Mr. Dunn:

Well, Jeff, I thank you for that presentation. I think it's something that we all needed to hear. One of the things that I noticed when you sent out the updates with the COVID response in regards to cases that come up during the school week is that the impact is very low on the overall district. We don't want to marginalize the impact to the individuals, but the fact that you, with the help of your staff have created an environment where you're operating very safely and I think it would be not a wise decision to go outside of the plan that is currently working. Now working ... the assessment that I use for that-

PART 1 OF 5 ENDS [00:31:04]

Mr. Dunn:

The assessment that I use for that is this working for the whole, not, there are some people that are impacted, everybody is impacted by this in some way, shape or form. And we keep saying that we could make a case for each individual person and the reasons why. So I think the overall effort is a very good one. I think that keeping it within a very low percentage, in these times where the percentage game is skyrocketing around us would only be proved to continue with the program that we are using through constant diligence and constant evaluation. And I think the key components of what we said is having a plan implemented. If there is a severe downturn, we can jump right into the, to incorporate the full time and attendance.

Mr. Dunn:

But I think that I support the path that you're on, and I appreciate the hard work that everybody is putting here for this. And the only thing that I would ask the community that the anybody's listening, is just to have patience. This COVID is impacting everyone's lives on a daily basis in so many different ways. And we really need to deep down, dig down and be patient and do what's best for everybody. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, John. Any other board members want to make some comment? I see Kathleen. Go ahead.

Ms. Curtin:

Yeah. I definitely agree with John. It's very disappointing that we can't move home right now, but I do think it's the right thing to do. But I also wanted to say thank you to Mr. Simon's, and your entire staff. I work with a lot of people who are in the healthcare field, and they're talking about how overwhelmed these County department of healths are, and how they are so far behind on the contact tracing. And the fact that the district has taken this on and is very, very proactive and gets the word out, does everything that we need to do. And lets people... Gives people the information that they need in a very timely manner is not a small task at all. And I really, really appreciate, and I hope our community understands how far above and beyond you're going with this because like I said, if it were up to the department of health, we would still be waiting on a lot of this notification and a lot of this information. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, Kathleen. Any other comments? Can't tell. Michelle, go ahead.

Ms. Skumurski:

Sorry, I had it on mute. Without a doubt, I think we can all say we agree with Jeff, very disappointing that we can't bring them back in. We were excited about that, but given the flux and the issues that we're having juggling the flux and the issues that we're having right now in the community. I think it would be a very inappropriate choice for the safety of all to bring them in at this point, because it is becoming so much more rapid and common in our community. We need to limit exposures as much as we can. And again, I asked that we revisit this, as Jeff said, maybe in the January timeframe, if we see a better light towards the end of the tunnel. But at this point I think I can say I support the decision not to bring them in full time at this point and hopefully revisit it again, maybe right after the holidays and see how we're going there.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. Thanks Michelle. Anyone else? Jennifer?

Ms. Massey:

Thank you, Mike. So I, too, am disappointed that we won't be able to move forward. I know how hard everybody has worked to get a plan in place to make that happen. And unfortunately what's occurring in our community and across the country is just not putting things in our favor to do so. So I, too, support not moving forward. But again, look forward to hopefully after the holidays that we're able to reconsider that and put some things in place to be able to bring the kids in more frequently than what's occurring right now. So again, I just want to say to everybody who's worked a plan to put it in place. Thank you. So at least we have that and we're ready to move forward when hopefully things can go in

the other direction and they are not spiking. So again, thank you for that. It is disappointing, but together we'll get through it.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks Jennifer. Anyone else? Mark? JoAnn? Deanna, good? All right. I think we have to head forward in this. I will just echo the frustration. We were very well prepared to pivot to this model that was proposed and it was really contingent on the fact that things stayed in the same trajectory in a positive way versus the spread increasing. And the other fact that we have to consider is if we tip the scales into one of the zones and we ended up having the mandatory test to stay open, which it has enough challenges in itself, we're going to be remote. So there's a lot of other factors that are impacting these decisions. And a lot of districts with large transportation departments, geographic regions just cannot sustain the increased days on the road and still staff their drivers and have the substitutes when things happen.

Mr. Buono:

As we saw recently in some nearby school districts that the transportation issues really could force it, large district to go remote pretty quickly. So it is unfortunate, but I think we have the plans in place. And I agree with Mr. Simon's and the board members we'll be able to pivot as soon as we can and manage this. And we'll get that information, keep the community up to date on when we can do those kinds of things. And again, we all want to do it as much as you do, but we have to protect the safety of our families, kids, and our staff to make sure that we can stay in this hybrid model for as long as we can, without having to go full remote like some other schools.

Mr. Simons:

I appreciate the board's understanding of the dilemma we're in. Again, just to reiterate, I really do appreciate understand the challenges for our youngest children and for our families and this whole thing. It is a concern that I think about, worry about every day. We have worked as an administrative team and within our teachers to try to make the remote learning and the virtual learning work as best as possible. To reiterate what we've said in previous meetings. If there's an individual concern, we want you to contact the child's teacher, or with your child's building principal. We have ways to try to resolve issues that will make the learning in remote context or in the virtual context work better. And we've had a number of steps that we've taken to approve of the situation. One thing that Mr. Buono talked about that I did want to talk briefly about is the state's micro cluster program, which is evolving and changing somewhat.

Mr. Simons:

The Governor announced in October that the Department of Health was going to oversee a different approach to the rise in COVID cases. And rather than focus on entire regions of the state or the entire state in terms of a strategy to reduce or mitigate spread of COVID. The micro cluster strategy that's in place, will focus on zip codes and smaller zones, where there are difficulties and rising cases. Through that program, different areas based on their population were identified into different tiers. Within each tier established rate of infection over a seven day average would trigger certain measures that schools would have to take. Under the current plan, there are yellow zones, orange zones, and red zones. Our district is not in a zone right now.

Mr. Simons:

Interestingly, however, the infection rate is above right now, the 3.5% infection rate that would normally trigger what was decided in October. However, about a week and a half ago, the governor decided that popularization rates were really important to monitor and include within the metrics to decide whether or not some of these measures that would force us to be in the yellow zone and orange zone red zone. So the formula is evolving and changing and not really clear right now. I'll give the example of Albany County. Albany County has been in the threshold while above the ozone. I think in the orange zone for several weeks, a couple of weeks, but it's not in an orange zone. So we are talking with the department of health about this because in the event that we are notified by the state that our school system is in an area that is considered to be in one of these zones. First happened to be a yellow zone.

Mr. Simons:

We can stay open and the governors has changed this over the last two weeks because he has looked at data that the schools are doing a really good job of the infection rates and the schools are very low. And he wants the schools to stay open because the schools are one of the safest places to be right now. And we're proud of that. So under a yellow zone, if we are determined to be in the yellow zone, we can stay open as a school, continue to offer in-person learning. If we test 20% of our overall faculty and staff and 20% of our students, faculty and staff that are working in person and students that are working in person over a two week period. If after that two week period, the testing results shows that our positivity rate, our infection rate is well below the micro cluster or the region. We can stay open and we don't have to do any more testing this league.

Mr. Simons:

Last week, the orange zone criteria was changed and orange zone schools no longer have to close and then test and then reopen. They can stay open as well, but there's a higher threshold for the infection rate. So we are talking about what we would do as a school district to implement the testing program for our students and our faculty and staff. And we're working with Questar Boces to implement that program should we need to do that.

Mr. Simons:

We're going to send a letter out this week, just communicating what's involved in that. We don't know whether or not that will happen, but we want families, students, and our employees to be prepared for that. And we are working with Questar for Questar to become a limited service laboratory. The state will provide the test. And it is going to be, as Mr. Buono said, a logistical challenge to implement this testing. But our intention, as a district, is to stay open. To continue to offer in person learning. And at some point, if the state requires us to do testing, we will be doing testing to the best of our ability so that we can continue to offer in-person learning. We'll be sending communication out about that probably tomorrow.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks Jeff. So with that will move to our discussion items. And one of the first topics is really the need around where we are today, according to Mr. McHugh. But this is something that the board was very interested in hearing in terms of where we are with our students, quarter one and compare to previous years. Some of the challenges that our students are facing and our staff are facing as they try to support our current model, Jim?

Mr. McHugh:

Good evening. So we're really taking a look at our term one course failures in grades six through 12 and our K five early universal screening data. On the first slide, just the emphasis of the quote is just the importance of awareness. So part of really looking at this data is that we really need to make sure that all stakeholders are aware of where your challenges are. So it's early awareness and it's ongoing monitoring of that data. On the next slide, we know all the national media attention that's been given, even this week regarding the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. We know there's a regression in student learning and we're seeing that as well. So on the next slide when we be look at Columbia high school, that first quarter ended on November six, and we took a look at our course failures. So our quarter one.

Mr. McHugh:

And typically the quarter one failures are higher every year than the remaining three quarters. So it's students getting back acclimated to that school and the routine. But this year we did see 809 course failures for quarter one, and it was 216 students that happened to fail more than one class. So we're seeing less students failing more than one class, but those students are failing multiple classes. So we dug into the data a little deeper. 809 course failures, just to put it in perspective and you think about the bell curve. It's about 10% of the overall courses that are offered. So 809 course failures is 10%. We run a little over 8,000 courses. What we do realize, and we really dig into that data is it's 79 students at Columbia high school, that account for 56, over 56%, of the course failure.

Mr. McHugh:

So 7,459 of those course failures are tied to 79 students. The reality, and there's been a lot of media attention to this too, is 12 Columbia high school students have not engaged at all. And that is a national trend. So when last March, we were forced to go remote the schools nationwide were forced to go to remote, a lot of students went into the workforce. And a lot of students started to make a little bit of money and they remained in the workforce. So districts nationwide are really having trouble to really account for all of the students that should be in school. That number, Mr. Harkin and his administrative team have really worked hard. I'll talk about that a little bit later, but that number is getting a little bit better. So when we look at 79 students accounting for over 56% of our course failures, who are they?

Mr. McHugh:

20 of those students are students with disabilities. 46 of the 79 students are classified as economically disadvantage. One of the 79 students is an English language learner and 44 of the 79 students are chronically absent, so that's not a surprise. We've constantly been doing attendance matters initiative. We know that there's a direct correlation between attendance and academic success. So what has Columbia done, and what are they currently doing? Multiple meetings, help teachers, guidance, counselors, social workers, building administrators. They've adjusted students' schedules. Multiple phone calls to parents, to child protective services. There's been a lot of efforts to secure P.I.N.S Petitions. Person in need of supervision. There was creation of building attendance team. So they're monitoring it on a daily basis. A lot of home visits, knocking on doors. We've used their school resource officer, our attendance attendance, our counselors, and our social workers to go knock on those doors.

Mr. McHugh:

We're encouraging remote students to return to in-person learning within our hybrid plan. We have noticed that students that are in the full remote model that are not connecting and not live streaming

in, and that the full remote models just hasn't worked for those students. We've encouraged them to return to our hybrid model. Our school counselors and school, social workers, making continued efforts to address social, emotional wellness issues. We know that impacts attendance as well as academic achievement. And we continue to use our child study team with targeted interventions, really specific to each student. On the next slide Goff middle-school. Again, that first marking period ended November six, and there's a breakdown by grade level. The number of students that failed one course, and then the number of students with multiple course failures. In addition, there's the number of students that failed more than one class, and then the total number of courses fail.

Mr. McHugh:

So you're looking at 319 courses that have failed. To put those numbers in perspective on the next slide, looking at academic data from the first quarter, for the last three years. We are more than double those course failures at the middle school level this year. 122 course failures during the 1819 school year, 139 last year during quarter one, and 319 this year. On the next slide, those 319 course failures there's 150 students. We've really looked at those students who failed at least one course. That's 16% of the total enrollment at Goff failed at least one class, and that's the breakdown of the number of classes failed. You start to look at students that failed more than one class and you look at those numbers. We're well aware of who those students are. On the next slide, 50 of the 77 students who failed two or more classes are identified as economically disadvantaged. 44 of the 77 students who failed more than two classes are chronically absent.

Mr. McHugh:

Again, we see that importance of being in attendance. 13 of the 77 students are students with disabilities. Two of the students are English language learners. 37 of the 77 students fall into one subgroup category, and that's important data too. So there's a lot of different things, different challenges those students are encountering. What has Goff done and what they continue to do? Again, there's ongoing monitoring of attendance. There's multiple contacts with parents and students. Google meets, phone calls, counseling sessions in person, virtual, lots of emails, encouraging full remote students again to return to the hybrid model. Failure letters are mailed home to parents. Instructional support team meetings every other Wednesday. Again, home visits, we're out knocking on doors. We use our school resource officer and our building administrator. Again, CPS calls, P.I.N.S, Academic intervention services, recommendations, mental and physical health reviews, manifestation meetings through our PPS office, parent conferences. And Goff conducts Tuesday team meetings, where they review student concerns, update teachers and staff, and plan for next steps.

Mr. McHugh:

So how deep do we really look at these course failures? We look at them by the student, obviously. We look at them by the subgroup. That's when we're talking about students with disabilities. We're talking about economically disadvantage. We're talking about chronic absenteeism, but we look at them by family. So are there multiple children from the same household that aren't engaging and aren't attending school? We look at it by grade. We look at by academic department. English, math, social studies, science, physical education. We look at it by course. We look at it by subject. We break it down by teacher and we look for trends. We look for trends in that data. Is it an outlier? Is it an unusual year? Or is it something that seems to occur over multiple years? And we look at it by region. We compare our numbers within our Questar, within our regional information center.

Mr. McHugh:

And we participate in capital region meetings to hear what other school districts are facing and what their data looks like. So it's not acceptable. We're not saying that those 809 course failures at our high school are acceptable. We are really working on it. We're aware of it. Teachers are aware of it. But it is a consistent problem amongst all schools. In regards to kindergarten through grade five, we took an early look at the loss of learning and the impact of COVID-19. These are our universal screeners that we use kindergarten through grade two, and then grade two through five. On the next slide is the results of those universal screeners. What I do want to point out is that the universal screeners that we use K through five are not recommended to be given in a remote virtual format. So those universal screeners need to be given in person. So the data is skewed.

Mr. McHugh:

We have a large population of K five students that are in a full remote. But what we are noticing is that we've consistently established cut points, right? So we determine what's grade level expectation. We identify typically the 20% of our students that may be falling below that cut point. And those are the students that we provide additional academic intervention services to. What we have noticed, if we use the cut points that we've always utilized over the past couple of years, that is no longer about 20% of our students. It's actually about 70% of our students right now. So we've seen that regression in learning. We're well aware of it. That again is a national trend. It's not something that's unique to East Greenbush schools. What I will say is that our administrative team has worked very hard and it's ongoing discussions that occur almost daily about what to do when this COVID 19 pandemic turns around and our students are back in our classrooms.

Mr. McHugh:

We're trying to be proactive. Even when we start to talk about budget for the 20 21 22 school year, we're talking about what are those supports that we really need that our students need? And we're talking about the things that we can do right now. Yeah. For example, we have provided tutoring to some students that we identify would make that a difference. If we had that ongoing daily support, that additional support whether it's virtual, it's most likely in a virtual format. But we've looked at everything that we could possibly do. Connecting students to outside services, to help families through these times. But we are exploring and trying to prepare for when this COVID 19 situation turns around and our students are back with us. Any questions at this time?

Mr. Buono:

Any questions, board members out there? I can see hands up. Okay ready to go. Questions? Michelle, I see your hand.

Ms. Skumurski:

Just a quick question and or comment. Where is the breakdown of the classes that we are struggling the most with? Is it math and science versus English? Do we get a trend of what has happened? And is that a consistent trend that we've had in the previous years? Or do you think there's some uniqueness to it because of the COVID year?

Mr. McHugh:

So that's a great question and there's a couple of points that I really want to make. One is we need to be mindful that SED has not made any sort of announcement that the Regents examinations will not be given in June. So there are five required Regents exams that students have to pass to graduate from high

school. So our faculty is in a really challenging and difficult situation, right? You have your content, your curriculum, that students are going to be held accountable for that New York city Regents exam. At the same time, trying to balance social, emotional wellness, and really do what's best for students. So what the data shows is that our core departments, meaning mathematics, English, language, arts, science, and social studies, those course failures are really pretty much the same. There's somewhere between 130 to 140 failures per department.

Mr. McHugh:

But on another note, physical education is just as high. When we looked at that, we had a department meeting with our physical education department immediately, and we really took a deep look at what the requirements are. And our physical education department has been more than accommodating. So because of COVID-19, there is no required changing. There's no locker room. Students are reporting right to that area. When the weather was cooperative, they were outside. Activities like can jam and there were all kinds of activities that students needed to get engaged in. So if the students got out there and they played, whether it was canned jam, corn hole, there was music playing. It's a simple part that we talked about, increased responsibility. And we heard that from our public, right? That we wanted increased accountability and responsibility, and our teachers have stepped up. Some of the students need to do the same.

Mr. McHugh:

So when you have 131 failures in physical education, it's just that students aren't engaging at all. So we're working on it, our counselors are working on it, our social workers are working on it. But you do see some commonality amongst our core departments. And then of course, we look at some of our other non cores as well.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you. Any other questions from Board? John?

Mr. Dunn:

Thank you for that data, Jim. That's very informative, and it gives us a good overview on how to move forward. I noticed the number of 12 is not engaged at Columbia's. It was pretty consistent the last time. Is it your opinion that they're not in the district or moved? Or what do you think the status is of those 12 that seems to be out there?

Mr. McHugh:

That's a great question. And I think Mr. Harkin is on, he might have an updated number, but for example, students were enrolled at Columbia high school in the spring of last year. Our attendance teams and Mr. Harkin are going out and knocking on doors. We find out that the family no longer lives there, they moved. Usually typically when they move, they re-enroll their child in that school district, because of COVID-19, you could assume that students had just not enrolled. So we've had the business and the challenge of really trying to track folks down. And Mike could give us an update, but we have located a few, Mr. Harkin are you on?

Mr. Harkin:

Yes, I'm here. Thank you, Mr. McHugh. As of today, we got three more names off of that list. We were down to two students and it's just like Mr. McHugh mentioned. 10 of those 12 moved into the district

[inaudible 00:59:58] and then kind of never had the ability to engage with us. And then they kind of have just refused to engage. Some of them moved out but we are doing a great job with location and child protective services. Had our Social workers there every Wednesday. But we have that list down to two is great for us and we're hoping to get those last two names off the list before the end of the month.

Ms. McGrath:

Mr. McHugh, I can tag in that two of those twelve students are experiencing homelessness.

Mr. McHugh:

Okay.

Mr. Harkin:

Thanks, Mike.

Mr. McHugh:

Thank you very much.

Mr. Buono:

Any other questions for Mr. McHugh?

Ms. Massey:

I was just going to say, thank you to Mr. McHugh for pulling that information together. I know you and I have had a conversation about that and it's the data that will help us, now as well as going forward and being able to identify as quickly as we can. And then I know the team is working really hard and diligently to try to secure the additional services and supports that are needed. So I appreciate those efforts that are going into that. Is there a plan? My one question is, is there a plan that we will get these periodic updates throughout this year as you're monitoring the data? Is that the plan?

Mr. McHugh:

Absolutely.

Ms. Massey:

Okay.

Mr. Buono:

Jim's the data guy. All right. Just a couple of comments. I want to appreciate the team and all the staff for all the work that they've done to engage our students remotely and in person and the challenges that presents of the district. The board made a decision to keep a lot of our support staff in those roles, AIS readings, et cetera. And I think without those supports and the activities that the staff do, we would see much larger numbers than we're seeing right now. I really believe.

Mr. McHugh:

I appreciate that comment.

PART 2 OF 5 ENDS [01:02:04]

Mr. Simons:

... we're seeing right now. I really believe that.

Mr. Simons:

I appreciate that comment Mr. Buono I can just promise the board that we're going to be bringing some information to the January meeting based on some discussions we've been having with the principals and social workers and the counselors regarding some things that we can do this year to address our most severe situations and to prioritize. Through the attendance committee of the district, we met about a week and a half, two weeks ago and I also met in a separate meeting with Mr. McHugh, the principals and the social workers and the counselors. And we identified some ways that we could take this data and see what we could do to turn it around a little bit and maybe bring some children in, individual situations or in small group situations to expand their in-person learning. We're going to have to because of resources and all the requirements, take somewhat of a triaging approach to try to get some of these kids back into school for more in-person learning.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. McHugh mentioned the tutoring, but we're also considering perhaps creating some blocks of time after school, normal school operations times when other students are there for different kids to come in and get in-person instruction on the remote days.

Mr. Buono:

And my worry is that as things I guess, of course heat up with COVID and spread, I don't know if we have numbers tonight, but we know that more parents are choosing to keep their kids home and stay remote. And also parents who worry on certain days, but as they are be [inaudible 01:02:40] that, I'm not sure I want to send my kids in, even though they are a full remote student. So we don't know which way this is going to go come back second marking period because of the impact of the whole pack of parents and families with their children to not be in person.

Mr. Buono:

As we segue into the next item, you can see the board goals really are going to focus on those efforts and really the resources we need to provide our families for the remainder of this year. And then as we talked about maybe the preliminarily, the budget, what are the resources we're going to have to put in? And the steps we're going to have to take to really get our students back on track who have missed that adjustment period when they were typically in the spring, come back in the fall, we know there's usually a gap. But this gap is almost a quarter wider for some students. Really a lengthy period of time that students typically adjusted by that.

Mr. Buono:

I would like to open up the conversation to our second, especially on the board goals and our priorities for the year. And talking to Mr. Simons about this and discussions from last meeting he put together for us some important priorities. Jeff, do you want to walk us through?

Mr. Simons:

Sure. Based on the conversation we had in the last board meeting, the board identified that we should focus on a few things with an age goal and prioritized under academic excellence, studying student and academic, social, emotional data and evolving plans to address student learning gaps and where the data that Mr. McHugh just presented is a starting point for that. And also looking at what we can do to modify the instructional program to make it continue to improve under COVID-19 during the period of COVID-19.

Mr. Simons:

They also asked the administration to review courses and programs for potential changes. There are courses that maybe we want to take a look at possibly fading out that way, secure resources that might be available to address some of the needs that we're talking about or possibly accrue chief savings within the budget. We are starting to do that.

Mr. Simons:

I know Mr. McHugh has had conversations with the middle school and the high school about a program of studies in the courses, and we've started that. And to continue to monitor and supervise the delivery of instruction in the remote and virtual learning. So under academic excellence, I think we tried to capture what the board shared last time. So maybe we could stop at that point and see what the board thinks about the outline academics.

Mr. Buono:

Sounds good. Is there any feedback on that first edit excellence go again where the focus really is the resources to our students and getting those things that we need to maintain that excellence based on the data. So any feedback on goal number one? Support that.

Mr. Simons:

Second goal is later to delivering effectively the educational, human and fiscal resources. A lot of steps have been taken to improve our human resources office. Under, Ms. Cannon has been with us for a short while and done a remarkably good job. We want to continue to focus on the things that we've started and continue to make them even better. And the real focus on ensuring that our building hiring committees are organized and structured and trained in a way to make sure that we are selecting the most qualified candidates using objective criteria of white bias. Additionally, Mr. Buono spoke to me about the importance of including a goal related to the budget. So I've included that as the second goal under effective delivery of resources.

Mr. Buono:

Good. Feedback? Goal two? Good. All right . Let's move on to goal three.

Mr. Simons:

Goal three relates to maintaining positive relationships and communication with our families and our community. We want to continue to build our relationships with our families within our school system, as we are operating differently under COVID-19. And we want to make sure that we continue to assess the family and community needs. Additionally, we suggested that we want to continue to raise awareness, increase awareness, and involvement, and recognize the people within our district and our community who are really highlighting the needs and addressing the needs through our family, food,

nutrition programs, and backpack programs. So a lot of activity going on right now, and our board is directly supporting that with Mrs. Taylor taking the lead role in that.

Mr. Buono:

I think goal three captures quite a bit. Comments? Good.

Mr. Simons:

Last we want to always continue to ensure a progressive, innovative, and safe environment and culture within our schools. We have implemented the climate survey. I spoke about that at the safety committee meeting last night. We have scheduled opportunities for the high school kids to take the survey at the end of this week, but we didn't get a lot of response having them do it on their remote days so we are going to assign them to do it during our class periods. The board last year wanted us to include professional, progressive and innovative. And we've tried to do that even under track circumstances right now. I think there is some surprises later on with Mr. McHugh and the swagger are going to announce a positive news front, that show that we are always trying to be innovative.

Mr. Buono:

Awesome. That's great. That's where you can always use some positives. So those are the four goals with the objectives or anything. I think the capture really what we need to do for the remainder of the year and then really continue to engage our community families and even students, as we talked about earlier with the student council. How do we continue to engage our high schoolers who are towards the other career and to see the normal social activities that you get from a high school experience. And I think the assessment focus is the team to keep the hard work that they're doing, and also the progress that we can follow throughout the rest of the school year. So any comments overall? Board members? John?

Mr. Dunn:

Just a quick comment, Jeff, I want to thank you for condensing and capturing the sentiments of the board. What I think is important about having a conversation in public about the goals during these times is that it's transparency. Because the situation is very fluid and moving all the time it reminds us and also the community what are our path forward is. And that we're always trying to stay within the lines and with what we have in front of us with a lot of competing and flipping interests. I think that the fact that we put transparency and our mission statements and our goals in the forefront in the public eye, people have the opportunity to see even when they don't agree with what we're doing, where we're trying to take them. I thank you for continuing your pledge to the transparency operation of this district.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you John. Anyone else? This group. Kathleen? Just on you.

Ms. Curtin:

Yeah. I was actually looking to see if I could get the actual wording on goal four. This past week I actually did 11R with the United States School Board Association on implicit bias and institutional racism. And that's definitely going to fall under that goal four. Unfortunately, one of the things that they did come up with as they were talking is the climate survey and everything was definitely on the right road, but they did say that it takes resources. I think that's where it could be as goal as wanting to be with us for a

couple of years now because I think we are going to have to prioritize resources. There's definitely things we could be looking at now, but we may not be able to put as much into that right now as we would possibly like to.

Mr. Buono:

Yeah. Especially, with the uncertainty around aid. You can you hear from the governor today or about the aid in the budget. But those implications are for this district. And could be significant. Any other comments?

Ms. Taylor:

I just have one comment, Mike. And these are excellent and I do think they are exactly what we needed for the school year. We need to focus on where we have made our successes and making sure that we're not losing ground on the [inaudible 01:13:00] world. These are perfect for that. The one I ended up my you guys considering is in number three, we talked about the food program. We do an amazing job in this district of helping out families within our district. And obviously it's all confidential and private but Mike does a great job [inaudible 01:13:25] but it's an amazing program. It is an easy program and maybe we could incorporate that into one of our goals because it's great to get the community engaged in helping within our own district. And I think if we did that a lot more I think we could even do more amazing things and the amount of items and things that we do for these families that really need it is just astonishing and I would love to see it grow more and more.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you Michelle. You think about the different clubs, activities, sports, music, arts, everything that the different groups did from elementary, middle school, high school, to engage in the community and do community activities. You know, we're missing all that and we're doing the best we can to fill those gaps, but the gaps are why we still need to address them. And I think the committee has shown that there was some leadership, the people at district, how much they care and how much they want to help others.

Mr. McHugh:

We'll make that change a lot of paper drafts. And I think those are good suggestions and we'll send it out in the morning.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks. All right. Did I miss anybody? We're good. We're going on onto the next segment. On the item today it sound like a change in design about a position. Let's turn over to Marissa.

Ms. Cannon:

Thank you. After about 15 years of service with our district, our payroll clerk will be retiring on January, 29th of 2021. Right now our business office has had a complete turnover, over the past year. And the payroll clerk position is a very important position in our district. So we wanted to make sure that we had the right person coming into that role that could support that office.

Ms. Cannon:

We looked at the current job description and minimum qualifications of our payroll clerk and noticed that the current description only required two years of experience in payroll. We believe and we're confident that we need more than two years of experience to support the payroll department in present day. So we partnered with Bressler County Civil Service to see what payroll titles currently existed. And there are only two right now in our County is payroll clerk, which is our current title and then a payroll coordinator. We did review the job description and minimum qualifications for payroll coordinator. And that is more of a supervisory role in this position within our district does not have any supervisory responsibilities.

Ms. Cannon:

So Mrs. Wager and I decided it would be advantageous to the District to create a new title to reflect the present day duties of the position and also have more experience as a requirement. We had put together minimum qualifications that include an associates degree with three years of full-time paid experience in payroll transactions or graduation from high school and five years of full-time paid experience in payroll transactions.

Ms. Cannon:

The position itself would not change in compensation. So it would be under the management confidential memorandum of understanding still at the 22 hours and 40 cents an hour for level one, step one. So we are looking for the board support to move forward with that position change.

Mr. Buono:

Any questions or comments? One thing I can say is that I think anytime there's attrition in retirement or changes in personnel, one of the goals of the board was to review the position, make sure it meets the needs of the current department. Maybe look at the skillset see if things have shifted and to see if you can make those adjustments. And it sounds it's a cost neutral proposal as well. And the qualifications would hopefully have someone more experienced coming in and good. Cool to hit the ground running, I guess. And then doing more with that role. Any other comments? Board members?

Mr. Buono:

Who?

Speaker 4:

Mr. Neumann?

Ms. Wager:

Mike Neumann.

Mr. Simons:

Mike Neumann.

Mr. Buono:

It's areally important Board discussion topic. I'm not sure why Mike wants to chime in. Is everything okay?

Mike Newman:

Sorry, I raised my hand by mistake..

Mr. Buono:

It's okay Mike. You're welcome to chime in. Wherever they just want to hear from me about the adjustment in the title of the proposal. Now is this position a title that exists or does it need to be approved by the commission?

Ms. Cannon:

It's not a current title that exists, so it has to be approved by the commission.

Mr. Buono:

So if we are okay and move forward with this submission. Questions?

Mr. Mann:

So I'm assuming that we would probably hire somebody before the test comes out.

Ms. Cannon:

So right now, since we're creating the position, there would not be a test for it. So once we create the position with your approval, we would move to the next step, which would be the Rensselaer County County civil service commission. They would take action to approve the position. Our hire would be provisional. And then the commission and Rensselaer County would create the test.

Mr. Buono:

No, my experience is too, is that there's no testing going on around the areas. They'll be provisional for a while. Yeah.

Ms. Cannon:

I agree.

Mr. Mann:

I just don't want to see us hire somebody. And then all of a sudden Rensselaer County say no, and then we have to let the person go. I'm not sure whether we can get some type of assurance from civil service that. Yeah we'll look at it. It doesn't seem to be a problem. I really would hate to hire somebody and then civil service say, yeah, sorry. And then we have to let the person go.

Ms. Cannon:

We would first get permission from civil service to move forward with our hiring. So I plan on having that conversation tomorrow with Ashley, from Rensselaer County Human Resources Department, and then we can get the green lights to move forward, but posting our position and moving forward.

Mr. Buono:

Yeah. My experience with Rensselaer County is they meet every other Tuesday or once a month, and then they take under consideration these items and then they can move forward as the commission

approves it and then we can post it.. So we're good to go with that position. All right. The next item, transportation aid, and I know there was some comments that made the Governor about that.

Mr. Simons:

Yes. I know that the governor is advocating that the State Education department look at this and quote some recommendations to have, which is encouraging news. But we asked Ms. Wager to outline the issue.

Ms. Wager:

Thank you. Yes. I was going to follow up with the governor's conference today, which is a little bit more positive news, but on November 6th, the Education Department issued a memo. And part of that memo indicates, and I quote, "Education law does not authorize the state to reimburse costs associated with keeping employees or contractors on standby, maintain infrastructure, or other costs incurred when transportation services were not being provided to students during the period of school closures in spring 2020. Including costs associated with the use of school bus to deliver schools meals, homework packets, and wifi access, therefore school districts may not claim and receive state reimbursement for such costs." When I received that memo, I took a look at our transportation aid and I tried to make a calculation of how does this affect our district at the time? There, there is no official guidance as to how to calculate this aid.

Ms. Wager:

I looked at our transportation aid. In our budget, our transportation aid is estimated at \$4,250,400. That estimate is based on our projected 19-20 expenditures. Once we closed down in March, our expenditures were affected. So our expenditures for 19-20 came in less therefore our actual 2021 transportation aid is currently listed as \$3,806,529. So there's already a decrease of \$443,000, almost \$444,000. So I took it \$3.8 million. I divided it by the 10 school months and I multiply. I came out with \$380,653 per month and multiply that by three and a half months representing March 17 through two variant. And that equates to \$1,332,285. So that in combination would be already loss of aid due to lower than projected expenditures. But the total negative effect on our transportation aid could be as much as \$1,776,156.

Ms. Wager:

This is a conservative estimate, however, and it was the reasonable basis that I could come up with to calculate this. The governor's conference today, reported and this is more positive that if buses were used to deliver meals. Those expenses would be considered eligible and aid would be paid on those. This is what I estimated to be at this time. And we're hoping for more positive news in the future.

Mr. Buono:

Any comments? Jeff?

Mr. Simons:

I think I would add Ms. Wager did an excellent job of outlining the issue is we could not save any money by law in our transportation operation. Last year, we were under executive orders to keep all of our employees employed and to deliver food and to make sure that kids had instructional materials. This is a subject of discussion among the advocacy groups including the school boards association across the state. But we were not committed by law to save any money by reducing employees within the

transportation department and we needed them to deliver the food or so I think the governor understands that and is hoping for some regulatory information from the State Education Department .

Mr. Buono:

So more to come from the city on the issue. Any questions regarding issue? No. Thanks for the information and we'll monitor this situation over there as they shift that helps to set that cost. That's a big loss. The next one also overtime reports business wise, Linda.

Ms. Wager:

The Board has asked us to closely monitor the overtime that the district is paying in light of everything going on. So I provided for you a summary of the overtime that we paid for the last four payrolls. That would be an October 23rd, November 6th, November 20th, and December fourth. I wrote down the maintenance or I broke down the overtime by department that is being charged to. Most of the overtime that is being paid is being paid because we have maintenance subs coming in the evening and disinfecting every night. Our maintenance subs are coming from across the district. It is important to know that well, the base rate for a maintenance sub is \$15 and 74 cents. If we have employees reach the 40 hour Mark, where they're in their regular day role during the district. They are paid overtime at that rate. We try to minimize that as much as possible, but we're running into a shortage of maintenance subs to do this disinfecting work.

Ms. Wager:

The other areas that we have overtime in, we have some in technology, and then we also have some in transportation. So these are the three areas where the overtime is occurring. And that seems very reasonable to me because we have the maintenance, we have technology needs, and we have transportation over time because we have a shortage of drivers. That is the overtime it's averaging about between 11 and \$14,000 per pay period.

Ms. Wager:

The other information that I provided to you was the straight time maintenance substitute hours. Those hours equated to 2,214 and a quarter hours over those four payrolls. And we're paying that at \$15 and 74 cents. So over those four payrolls that equated to \$834,852. So we have the overtime, but we also have the straight time of the maintenance. And I thought that that was all relative. Are there any questions on this?

Mr. Mann:

If we have an employee that works seven hours a day and then goes to a school to help clean at night and they work three hours, that's a 10 hour day for them. So if they work five days a week, then that's overtime?

Ms. Wager:

The over time, isn't equated until they reach the 40 hour mark. So if we have a 37 and a half hour employee working and they work maintenance in the beginning of the week, that gets them up over the 40 hours. So then when they're working their regular day job, that's where they're hitting the overtime. We're really trying to minimize that as much as possible.

Mr. Dunn:

Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

How do we feel about obviously the extra staff are needed to handle the additional disinfecting and things like that? How do we do feel about that from a budgetary standpoint? Early on some of the challenges claimed coming down a couple thousand dollars a little bit down a bit. How do we feel about the budget in terms of the staff over time and these additional hours?

Ms. Wager:

Well, these over time are unbudgeted expenses. However, they're absolutely necessary. And as I reported a little bit later, we're going to talk about the reimbursement from FEMA and how that will be affected.

Mr. Buono:

Great. So necessary to keep our district operational, necessary to make sure our students and staff have an environment that is clean and disinfected after the students leave and also make sure our technology needs are being met on a regular basis and our transportation needs as well to keep the buses running. It's important that we have this information so we can at least help you express any concerns you might have terms over time where things are, and we appreciate you. Any questions?.

Mr. Simons:

Employees that are doing this work, just so you know, I spoke to a person who works full time as a teaching assistant during the day at DPS and was working in our central office. And I would say a large part on the overtime is beneficial to the employees and beneficial to the district. I think in some cases he might donate just to help the kids. That was the conversation I had with some of the people that are [inaudible 01:30:21] this yesterday, and they benefit from the overtime we also want to pitch in to help the district should be appreciating.

Mr. Buono:

It does give us operational. Any other questions board members? No. Moving on to our last of the discussion on the board of education budget guidelines, Jeff do you want to take the lead again on this one?

Mr. Simons:

Last year, actually over the course, I'll turn it up. Last year, and really over the course of the last few years, we've had sort of discussions with our board about the budget development process, and we've done some things differently over the last few years and tried to be, as John said earlier, a little bit more transparent on our call that meetings about some of the factors that we're considering regarding the budget. We've developed different scenarios with the board to take a look at, to give the districts administration some guidance regarding much development. Last year, we decided to work with the board to have the board have some budget guidelines. The purpose of the guidelines is to make sure that the administration as we worked with here, budget information to share with the board, understands that the matters that the board wants us to work with them.

Mr. Simons:

These were the parameters from last year. I just share them with the board tonight to start the discussion. We are entering into what will be a very, very difficult budget year. As I said to the administrators, and we talked about this the other day, we've seen it every year, every meeting every year. We really mean it this year because we are really entering into a scenario where we may not have. This year we're getting the same amount of aid that we got last year. We may have a 20% cut if the federal monies doesn't come to the state by the end of the year. We are operating with expenses that we cannot anticipate or project this year. And we are utilizing some of the extra fund balance that we carried to pay for those expenses, but it's going to be a really rough year.

Mr. Simons:

So these guidelines are going to be important to make sure that our district administration and our staff work to try to achieve a budget that A, addresses our academic program needs, but also is mindful of the impact of the state aid consideration is on our district. If we can't simply shift that aid loss to our local taxpayers and...

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Mr. Simons:

Obligated to our own tax payers, right? I've had that conversation with Linda. She understands that. We're going to try to come up with a budget that meets the board's expectations.

Mr. Buono:

If you had a chance to look at the budget guidelines, I think they're as relevant now, as they were when we put them together, last year. I think the sense of urgency is even higher, though. Now when the administration, Jeff, your team looks at this, that we cannot put further burden on our taxpayers. And we want to make sure that we meet the needs, that's why the board goals and priorities from an earlier part of the meeting are going to be critical.

Mr. Buono:

And I think, Kathleen mentioned that the resources that we need to address the academic gaps, the equity issues, the social, emotional, mental health, wellbeing of our students and staff, they're going to be at the forefront. And we're going to have to really make some tough decisions this year, and give the administration some really strong direction on how we think they can best address those needs without breaking the bank, so to speak, because our community is not in a position to be able to do that, this year, and in the future years, absent some kind of significant aid package that comes from the federal government, through the state, that's all our taxpayer money, as well.

Mr. Buono:

So I think these are still excellent guidelines. If there's some adjustments you want to make, some priorities, maybe we highlight some that are more important than others, but I think if you want to add some comments now, or you, Jeff, the team's looking back, it would be much appreciated of helping them, because we don't meet again until the January, their process at the building level, pretty soon...

Mr. Simons:

... After this week. .

Mr. Buono:

Yep. So we're in that path, thinking about '21, '22, and I would ask the administrators to make sure that they understand that this is going to be very, very challenging for you, but it has to be done. Comments? JoAnn?

Ms. Taylor:

Just want to share with everyone, a discussion, today. We had a meeting, the Appendix D Committee meeting, today, and we had a discussion in regard to this. And there was some [inaudible 01:35:40] concern, regarding that last sentence in Appendix D, 'extra classroom closed as an area for potential sick patients.' The question being, are we looking more and more at Appendix D because we want to eliminate all of Appendix D? Is that why we are looking at it? Is that why we now have board representation on that committee? While we did talk about the severity of budget, it was pointed out that nothing is safe. The discussion of Appendix C, sports are always looked at the budget. I did reassure the EGTA members that, at this point, we are not looking to eliminate clubs, as much as look at what clubs are not being utilized properly, and seeing if we can cut corners, save some money, that way. And we had an in-depth discussion, on that. And they were just concerned about that last sentence.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, JoAnn. Comments? No? So we're going to give some feedback to Mr. Simons, the team, about these priorities and guidelines that we established last year, and then if there's some things that need to shift, or you support them, just let him know, as well, as he prepares with the team.

Mr. Simons:

One comment I would make, is, many, many years ago, when I was assistant superintendent for curriculum, the business official said to me, "Well, if you want to put that into the budget, what're you going to take out?" And that stuck with me, and as we look at the data that Jim shared earlier, Mr. McHugh shared earlier today, there may be a situation that the budget is so constrained this year, that academic intervention and other types of programs to bring kids back up to where they need to be, may have to be increased, and therefore we may have to pull some other things that are maybe nice to have, but are not mandatory, in order to be able to make that shift, so that those kids can get supported.

Mr. Simons:

For example, in the past, I started this discussion with our central office team, we hope that the situation gets better by the summer. Summer school is another topic that had been discussed with the board, before and, well, we don't want to go back to the expensive summer school program that was offered several years ago, but we do need to look at that as a possible option, for kids to come back for in-person learning in the summer, if the situation lends itself to doing that. And if we put that into the budget, we've got to take something else out, because we're not going to be able to play around those extra support programs to what we already have, and that's going to be a really tough set of decisions that we have to make.

Mr. Buono:

I'm not seeing any more hands raised for comments. So we'll move forward to committee reports. Mariska?

Ms. Cannon:

Thank you, Mr. Buono. Appendix D committee met, this afternoon, for several hours. Right now, we've established a well-thought out application, a well-thought out evaluation tool. And so today our goal was to start drafting a cost matrix, on how to bring us forward with the new payment structure for our Appendix D clubs.

Ms. Cannon:

So we first drafted what criteria are we going to be looking at, to evaluate these clubs, in terms of cost? Some of the criteria that we developed today, was looking at the number and frequency of meetings, the time commitment, planning, and preparation required for our advisors, instructional requirements, supervisory responsibilities, safety requirements, organization of supplies and materials, the anticipated student participation, the types of activities that the clubs involved, equally. And then lastly, financial management. Does the Appendix D club require fundraising and other financial management responsibilities?

Ms. Cannon:

Currently, we've decided on a point structure of one through four. So if somebody would rate four, it would be the highest amount of points. So for example, number and frequency of meetings, four would be the most meetings, one would be the least meetings.

Ms. Cannon:

And so we're working through, as a committee, right now, how to evaluate each Appendix D club in a meaningful way. We will continue to do that throughout the remainder of December. We have another meeting scheduled for next week, on the 15th, and then we have a meeting scheduled right before the holiday recess. So I look forward to providing a more in-depth report at our January meeting.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, Marissa. Any questions for Marissa? Linda?

Ms. Wager:

I have none, at this time.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, Linda. Mr. McHugh?

Mr. McHugh:

I'm looking for board support, this evening, for those January exam schedule. So we're all aware that the January regents are canceled, and that was scheduled to occur Tuesday, January 26, through Friday, January 30th. So we've already communicated with all of our stakeholders that that would be a normal week of instruction, in hybrid, in person and remote, and the live version, on Wednesday. That does create a situation, a challenge, for us, because our midterms for a full year course account for 5% of a student's final grade. If it is a semester course, a half year course, that is a final exam in place of a midterm exam, and that final exam would account for 20% of the student's final grade. We currently offer 27 courses for college credit. Those college credit courses, that midterm accounts for 25% of a student's grade.

Mr. McHugh:

So we started to talk about the efforts that we had made, over the last few years, to develop consistent midterm examinations. For the most part, when we create those midterm examinations, they mirror the New York City regents exam. So, typically, there's a part one, which, for example, would consist of multiple choice questions. And then there's a part two, that, typically is an extended response type of question. Those testing sessions do not fit well in a 45 minute block of time. So if it was a normal school day, and we tried to get those midterms during a normal day, 45 minutes, isn't going to allow the students to complete those exams.

Mr. McHugh:

So we also run into the challenge that we put that exam in front of our A-Day students on a Monday, they've seen that exam, and unless we create a whole new exam, that information could be given to a B-Day student. So... The exposure to that exam.

Mr. McHugh:

The other challenge is that if they don't finish on that Monday, they need to finish the next in-person day, which is Thursday. So they've seen the exam, they seen the questions, and we want to make sure that we are doing our part, to do two things. One, to increase academic integrity. We talked about that all the time and set the code of conduct. And we also want academic equity. So when we think about giving a midterm exam to students, in a remote format, and then also having some students have to take it in person, that's a challenge that we want to address, as well. So we proposed a schedule for the week prior to when the January regents schedule was to take place. And Monday, January 18th, it's a national holiday, it's Martin Luther King Jr day. And we're proposing a schedule, a modified schedule for Tuesday, January 19th, through Friday, January 22nd. That modified schedule would be all students. So, regardless of an A or a B, all students would be in attendance that day, through a virtual format.

Mr. McHugh:

So we are doing a modified schedule, instead of running eight periods a day, we would run four periods a day. So during that four day period, each course would have two testing, extended blocks, which would be a 75-minute period, in place of the traditional 45 minute class. If the course is running, and it doesn't have a mid-term to it, students would still have that extended class period with their teacher, as scheduled.

Mr. McHugh:

So there's another challenge, that's also part of this, is that our courses that are for college credit, our teachers need to reach out to those colleges and get approval for whatever format they're testing in. That takes time. So we really need to act on this, now. For example, if we state that those exams, or those mid-terms are to be given in-person, and we were forced, in January, to go full remote, there's no guarantee that we would get that approval to change that testing methodology. So this is kind of a safeguard. We put the four-day testing period bi-virtual, and students are taking the exams through a virtual format. It would be all students getting assessed in the same platform. With our efforts in technology, with GoGuardian, There is a way for our teachers to monitor what our students are doing. Teachers could set the scene through GoGuardian. Mr. Goodwin is prepared to give some professional development to our teachers, so that they are familiar with that component. But there is a way to monitor what our students are doing through, that virtual format.

Mr. McHugh:

So, looking for board approval, to give the 'okay' to have that modified schedule for Columbia High School, grades nine through 12, January 19th through the 22nd.

Mr. Buono:

Any questions for Jim, on the modified schedule? No? Is Mr. Harkin still here?

Mr. McHugh:

Mike, are you there?

Mr. Harkin:

Yes, I'm still here.

Mr. Buono:

Yeah, please comment, what do you think?

Mr. Harkin:

One of the things, too, we talked about, with the integrity, is this allows us to give the A-Day kids, on Tuesday, part one. And it would be kids on Wednesday doing part one, and B, on Thursday, part two. So the A-Day kid won't get both part one and part two as presented to the B kids. It also, and this was something that I thought I... If this was my days, I would probably tell my mother I was sick on Monday so I can stay home for the week, and take the test in the comfort of my house, as opposed to coming in. And Mr. McHugh and I talked about that, as well. And that's a genuine concern. We don't want to have increased numbers of students, telling us they're sick, and that are required to get a Covid test, to come back in, just because they want us to stay home and take the test in their own comfort. That came up. But I really think it's important for our college classes to be able to do this. It'll allow them to get the college credit, and like Mr. McHugh said, that safeguard is, should things continue to spike. So that's really the gist of this idea.

Mr. McHugh:

The other point I want to make, as well, is, if you look at our live virtual schedule, those periods are approximately 30 to 35 minutes, and teachers have five instructional periods. This is an increase in teacher responsibility. There's 300 minutes on the academic day, so it is an increase, regarding teacher accountability and teacher direct contact with our students. And what you have in front of you, tonight, is also the third draft of the proposal. So this has been going back and forth for quite a while.

Speaker 6:

Quite a shift from what we're used to, so I support it. I think it's a good idea. It's something that, hearing from Jim and Mike, it's the right way to go.

Ms. Curtin:

Jim, I also support it, and working in higher education with people, doing tests virtually, good luck in January. It's definitely interesting, but it's also the way that a lot of the schools are doing it, right now. And so when these kids go to school, who knows, even after Covid, what things are going to look like? So we are still preparing them for what could possibly be ahead.

Mr. Buono:

Good point. Excellent.

Mr. McHugh:

Any other questions?

Mr. McHugh:

I just want to thank our department chairs for their efforts behind this work. And I want to acknowledge Mr. Harkin for advocating for, first and foremost, as students, but also as faculty and staff.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you. Moving to the next committees. Jeff?

Mr. Simons:

Just a couple of brief committee reports. We met with our safety committee last evening, via Zoom. We talked about the health and safety protocols that are in place, related to Covid-19. That meeting with our staff, the nurse coordinator and our, student safety folks, and everything, from their assessment, seems to be going very well, I'd suppose, extend appreciation for the job that the nurses are doing, and indicated that things seem to be going well, even though the number of cases is going up, including the contact tracing.

Mr. Simons:

We talked about the contact tracing. I invited Karen Vincent, our Covid coordinator, to be part of the committee. She participated and explained how contact tracing is working, in the district. We talked about the 48-hour rule, from the time that the person indicated that they were symptomatic, and we go back and look at anyone that that individual, who now tested positive, has come into contact with, and explained some of the timelines, as well as what the quarantine requires of students, including the continued monitoring of symptoms, using the application that we have, that we're using on a daily basis, for our students and our staff.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. Bickel asked some questions, and we clarified, in regard to the... Is there an ability for someone to go and get a test during in quarantine period, and be released from the quarantine, early, if those results come back negative. There is not, currently, within New York state, or within the rest of the County department of health. There have been discussions in the CDC about modifying that. We don't think, or we don't know whether the state would even implement that. So it was a 14-day quarantine period.

Mr. Simons:

We also talked about what we talked about earlier, which was the New York state micro-cluster strategy, and preparing for the yellow zones, how that would work. I shared some numbers with the committee. We would need approximately 827 tests, test 20% of our students and our staff, checked in with their SROs, our principals and our safety supervisors, regarding how the lockdown drills have been going. Well, they've been going well. At our first meeting this year, it was reported that some of the enabling devices, such as the buttons in the office, and on the computer screen, to enable the system,

didn't seem to work, during the first drill. We tested those at Columbia High School, they were working just fine. It was more of an issue of hitting the button just right, and holding it down for a required period of time, and making sure that on the computer, the cursor is lined up.

Mr. Simons:

So we were really out of practice, because of Covid, and those systems should be working well. We also reported to the committee that we did task the application system for the radios at the high school. This is something that the board invested in, about a year and a half ago. It was simply an issue with the battery change, it needed to be made. It's been made, and the radios have been tested, and it's working.

Mr. Simons:

SROs provided a report. There is a lot of time being spent by our SROs at the middle school and high school, engaging with kids, and also intervening with those kids that we need to reconnect to, in the schools. The ones that we've been talking about, tonight, and we reported on the school climate survey.

Mr. Simons:

Nurses have indicated that the return to school protocols, which were a subject of discussion in the fall, are working very well. Parents have gotten used to what's required, and everything seems to be going smoothly. Mr. Mann had asked that we revisit the conversation regarding the stop armed cameras on buses. Police departments have indicated that they're interested in pursuing that. And we're going to talk further about how we get that conversation going again. Fire inspections have been rescheduled until after the holidays, and all-in-all, everything seems to be going in according to our safety and health plans, within the district.

Mr. Simons:

We also had a committee for [inaudible 01:54:14] awareness meeting, and this is where talked about some of these issues a little bit earlier. That happened yesterday afternoon. Our committee is broken into four sub-committees, and the sub-committees reported some of the work that they are doing, and identifying as priorities for this year. We told the committee, at our first meeting, that we recognize, given the circumstances, that there may not be an ability to do a lot, this year, but let's prioritize and see what can be done.

Mr. Simons:

In the area of family and community engagement, Molly McGrath is the chair of that committee, and I think they've come up with an excellent idea. They wanted to establish a welcoming committee in each school. So that we identify a parent or a staff liaison, so that if somebody moves into the district, and moves into the school, and particularly, if they come from outside the area, or they come from outside the country, so there's somebody there to welcome them, to familiarize them with the school, with the community, with the neighborhood. And they're going to try to get that idea off the ground, working with each respective school. Additionally, they want to have a welcome resource, after we register new students, and a website available for our families to take a look at, to familiarize them with community resources.

Mr. Simons:

Jennifer Carragher is the professional development chair. She is an ENL teacher. We are going to implement a PLC, which is a professional learning community, a post study, focusing on some literature

that deals with the topics of diversity, and begin our first book study in January, as a way for people who are interested, on a voluntary basis, right now, to participate in those discussions regarding diversity, and literature that's available for both kids and adults to discuss what can be difficult topics to discuss.

Mr. Simons:

We also talked about professional development, when things resume, in terms of our normal schedule, that we may need to have some mandatory training for our staff, on some of these topics, next year. Marissa Cannon is in charge of the policies and procedures committee. They have recommended that we take a close look at the code of conduct, this year, to make sure that we are utilizing inclusive language within our code of conduct. For example, the code talks about principles of civility, mutual respect, character, tolerance, honesty, and integrity. The committee is recommending adding words, such as inclusiveness, as well as making sure that the expectations for students, such as the dress code, are culturally sensitive.

Mr. Simons:

And the fourth sub-committee, chaired by both Mr. McHugh, and Alex [inaudible 01:56:51], you guys know principal, it wanted to take a look at tools that are available and published, to do a self-assessment of our district's curriculum and instructional resources, and then make a plan to take a look at whether or not we have issues within our curriculum that may have cultural bias. The committee was really a good shot in the arm, for me to talk about something other than Covid-19, so the enthusiasm was really great, within the group. And I really enjoyed working directly with them.

Mr. Buono:

Excellent. Thank you, everyone. Thank you. Any questions or comments, for Jeff?

Mr. Buono:

I think I just want to say to the SROs, their position is really unique, in the district. We think about the origin of the position, and how they really are supporting their students and faculty and families about helping to connect with the community. And they are part of our community, so I'm glad to see that they're involved, as well.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Moving on, we have the approval of draft minutes. I have, that everyone was in attendance, either remote or in person. Any questions, comments, revisions, to the minutes? Seeing none. I need a motion to approve those. Jennifer, and [inaudible 00:25:12], second. All those in favor? Approved.

Mr. Buono:

Approval of programs for residential disabilities, any questions or comments? Seeing none. I need a motion to approve that. Joanne. Second, Michelle. All those in favor? Approved.

Mr. Buono:

Reports and presentations?

Speaker 7:

Nothing further.

Mr. Harkin:

Nothing further.

Mr. Buono:

Table motions. I have none at this time, and all business board members like to add anything? Anyone?

Mr. Buono:

Then, moving to our consent agenda. We have items A through J. Any comments, questions, regarding the agenda items for consent?

Mr. Mann:

H.

Mr. Buono:

H. Mr. Mann.

Mr. Mann:

While, I understand that school at night, we don't need this position. I don't want to see us abolish the position. I'd like to see us do away with it for the 2021 school year. But it's a valuable position that, hopefully next year, when everything's back to normal, that I don't want to have to ask for this position again, or try to get it into the budget, if we could just suspend it for this school year, but not take it totally off the books, because having that person here at night, after school hours, I think, is valuable. It took us a while to get this position in here. I would just hate to see it go away, permanently.

Mr. Buono:

So what is the impact? There's an agenda item on the instructional non-instructional, that we have to discuss, then. Should we discuss that at an executive session?

Ms. Wager:

I think so.

Mr. Buono:

You think so? So you'd like that pulled, right now, Mark? We'll pull the item on the abolition...

Mr. Mann:

Yes, please.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. Everyone in support of pulling the abolition of the position for further discussion? Okay. So-

Mr. Simons:

You need a motion.

Mr. Buono:

I need to motion the table there... Mark. I need a second? John? All's in favor, so I'll table that for a discussion. Okay. So that's pulled.

Mr. Buono:

Does that impact is continuance, as well?

Ms. Cannon:

It does.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. Any other questions, first, about the consent agenda items?

Ms. Massey:

I do have some-

Mr. Buono:

Jennifer, go ahead.

Mr. Buono:

You're muted. There you go.

Ms. Massey:

I thought I clicked it. So I accidentally missed this, when I was doing the review of this, earlier this week, there is a non-instructional. I just have one question because it's not something that we would typically see, but there's one individual for rehire that has an asterisk, and it says conditional upon completion of requirements. So I just had one question on that.

Mr. Buono:

Go ahead, Marissa. Go ahead.

Ms. Cannon:

The individual in question just needs to get a physical, in compliance with DMV. We really need the substitute bus driver. We were hoping to approve this person and not wait until January 13th.

Ms. Massey:

Okay. Is that typical, that we do that without having all the conditions met?

Ms. Cannon:

I would say it's not typical. The license is in place, the fingerprinting is in place, just because of COVID-19 it just took the individual a little bit longer to get a physician appointment, but it is scheduled, and it should be completed by Monday.

Mr. Simons:

So he wouldn't actually be starting, correct?

Ms. Cannon:

Correct.

Mr. Simons:

Until he completes the physical? Your approval is predicated on him completing that physical, passing that physical, so that he can start, for the next meeting, which isn't until January. If he doesn't pass the physical and the information isn't provided to district, we would not permit him to start?

Ms. Cannon:

Correct.

Mr. Buono:

Any other questions on the consent agenda items? Alright. I'll need a motion to approve the consent agenda items, A through J, minus H? Frank. I need a second. Michelle. All those in favor? This agenda is approved. Was there any questions on the unpaid taxes issue? I think there was a very clear explanation about that, but you can get some further details, just to let us know how that mechanism works, and because I think it's a little confusing to the public.

Mr. Wager:

Sure. We have our tax collection, starts September 15th, and runs through the end of October. In that time period, we collected over \$52 million, \$52,312,341.48 of the amount that we expected to collect, which is \$54,173,265.45. So that \$1,860,000 that is unpaid, gets turned over to the County, added to the residents' property tax bill. And then the County makes the district whole-

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Ms. Wager:

Tax bill, and then the County makes the district whole by paying us that amount in late February.

Mr. Buono:

And then they basically absorb the responsibility and the penalties that they're getting for that which means they can take someone's property or whatever it is they get the benefit of. Whatever that outcome is.

Ms. Wager:

That's correct. When the taxes are turned over, there's an additional 7% penalty added to the taxes.

Mr. Buono:

So it's financially incentive for the County to do this. Anyway, I think the explanation was helpful so we can get it out into the minutes.

Mr. Buono:

All right, we're moving to new business, we had a food service analysis of a five year plan.

Mr. Simons:

Oh yes, I had the last board meeting, Linda and our independent auditor presented the audit for last school year. One of the findings in the audit was that the food service operation School Lunch Program is operating under a deficit. This has come up in the past and the District's General Fund is yet to offset on deficits within the food service department. Mr. Mann asked that we look at an analysis of what may be happening in terms of expenditures and revenue into that program. And Ms Wager put something together that I think is very informative, so, I'll let Ms. Wager present it.

Ms. Wager:

Okay. Thank you. So I provided a five year analysis of the Food Service Program. One thing you must know is that although the ending fund balances are negative for the years ending June 30th, 2016, through June 30th, 2018, the negative balances significantly decreased. And we wound up with a positive fund balance of 23,000 at the end of June 30th, 2019. This is due to many positive changes that have taken place in the program, which have been implemented by the food service manager that was Phyllis Sanford Krug. Some of those changes include food carts were put in the lobbies of Columbia High School, Golf Middle School, and [inaudible 02:06:21] elementary, as well as grab and go meals were prepared and put in available to the other elementary schools. This resulted in an increase in sales because it was convenient for students as they came in to grab those breakfast items.

Ms. Wager:

And it decreased the amount of labor in the meal preparation part of that. Another area that Ms Sanford Krug really concentrated on was customer service. She focused her professional development with our staff on customer service. Even looked at making the menus visually more appealing. So unfortunately the pandemic affected our food service program. So as you can see, we started out 2020 with the \$23,374 positive fund balance. Unfortunately, our revenues shut down. Once we reached mid March, we were mandated by governors order to continue to provide meals to our students free of charge. So we did not have the revenue coming in. However, we maintained our expenses because our staff were still preparing the meals and we were staffing so that families could pick up their meals. And we also delivered some of the meals. So we went from a \$23,000 positive fund balance to a negative 170,000 by June 30th of 2020.

Ms. Wager:

And that was a result of \$193,000 loss during that year, which really was the effect of the pandemic. One thing I want to know is that every year, the General Fund budgets a subsidy transfer to the Lunch Fund that has gone between 150,000 to 200,000. But basically over the last few years has been 165,000. This may be an area that we need to look at, as we prepare the budget for next year, we may need to consider based on this, the loss of the program, and that is continuing this year because we are continuing to provide free meals. So we may need to look at increasing that subsidy transfer. Are there any questions on this?

Mr. Mann:

So we're still providing no charge meals to anybody?

Ms. Wager:
Through June 30th.

Mr. Mann:
Through June 30th? So anybody that comes to school.

Ms. Wager:
That's correct.

Mr. Mann:
Is it possible, Linda, to get any kind of quarterly update for example, on how we're doing for this year?

Ms. Wager:
Absolutely. Sure. In January I'll provide an update.

Mr. Mann:
To just get a sense of where we are?

Ms. Wager:
I'll provide an update as to where we are.

Mr. Buono:
Yeah. 'Cause we're looking at maybe a significant transfer to support this year's [inaudible 02:09:46]

Mr. Mann:
Can we also, Linda, get... What are we really charging now? If this was a regular school year, what are we charging for lunches?

Ms. Wager:
I'll provide what the rates are right now. We do, however, still claim reimbursement from Federal and State. Although it's much less than we would have anticipated. So [inaudible 02:10:16] I'll give you an update at the January meeting.

Mr. Mann:
Are any of these losses going to be covered under the good news on Federal reimbursement, FEMA?

Ms. Wager:
Stay tuned Mr. Mann.

Mr. Buono:
All right. Any other questions for Linda on the... Thank you for the analysis articles. A great subject to break down because it is a significant impact to transfer. And we do appreciate the work that our food

service and lunch programs have provide for our families and communities. It was necessary. It was needed to help people get through, and continue to get through difficult times.

Ms. Massey:

[inaudible 02:11:00] I just wanted to add, I also know that several years ago we had the external assessment and I know that Phyllis and her team that really worked diligently to implement those recommendations and clearly consider based on the five-year analysis that's been provided and unfortunately, circumstances beyond. I think that team's control rate has put us into their [inaudible 00:07:31], but you can definitely see the progress that's occurred. And it would be wonderful once we get back on track to get another update from Phyllis and her team on all of the things that they've continued to do.

Mr. Buono:

Great points, Jennifer. Great points. Thank you. Anyone else? No. All right. Let's move on to the FEMA reimbursement. You've been holding out on us a little bit here.

Ms. Wager:

Yes. Let's have some positive news.

Mr. Buono:

All right.

Ms. Wager:

So earlier this week, myself and Mary Ridzi, who's our new treasurer and supervising accountant, had a conference call with Thomas Burrigo, who is our Disaster Assistance Representative from the New York State Division of Homeland Security, to [inaudible 02:12:20] for our FEMA account. We set up an account with FEMA and we have been tracking expenditures associated with the COVID pandemic since last March. We can now start to claim those expenditures and we are eligible for 75% reimbursement on those expenses, the eligible expenses. A lot of what I've tracked has been buying supplies, buying equipment, disinfecting equipment, contracting services for cleaning services at our alternate locations. And I have been told also that we'll be able to include this maintenance over time. There's the subs that we've hired, we'll be able to include that. We made some major technology purchases that we purchased through Questar so that we could receive the aid [inaudible 02:13:23] on that next year.

Ms. Wager:

I'll be able to claim the net of those expenses for 75% reimbursement, as well as our own time in putting this application together. Our salaries, our fringe benefits. So we're working diligently on that. We have a lot of information already. We will probably file more than one application because they made a change in the program. So this used to be for expenses through September for 15. Now they've extended it for expenditures through January of 2021. So we will file an application for expenditures through September 14, so we can get that going and then we'll work on the next application. But I think this is going to be, as I've reported before, we are reaching, we're approaching \$1.5 million in COVID expenditures. And so this will be a real benefit to the district to get the application filed. Have 75% reimbursement on that and it's a real positive

Mr. Buono:

It is a very good positive.

Ms. Wager:

We expect that... We're told that once we file the application, which will take some time, that the reimbursement takes five to eight weeks.

Mr. Buono:

Well, that's pretty quick turnaround.

Ms. Wager:

I think so. Yes.

Mr. Buono:

I mean, it wasn't the exact... My question is what's the turnaround time that'd be a welcome [inaudible 02:15:05] amount to have two chunks come.

Ms. Wager:

And these representatives from Homeland security are very helpful. They've sent us additional information and there'll be checking in with us from time to time and...

Mr. Buono:

Good.

Ms. Wager:

Very accessible.

Mr. Buono:

Excellent. Any questions for Linda? And I really appreciate that you track those expenses diligently from the start and it was very helpful. It will be very helpful, I'm sure with this process. So, thanks for putting a smile on the face of the board members.

Ms. Wager:

Okay.

Mr. Buono:

Any questions for Linda? Board members? Great. It is a good way to cap our meeting tonight. If there's no other comments or questions for Linda, I will move to a second public forum and shifting gears [inaudible 02:16:00] to any emails that we might have from community members. Take your your time.

Ms. Wager:

Sorry about that.

Mr. Buono:

That's okay. It's okay. We're shifting back and forth.

Ms. Wager:

Yes. So we do have one comment from Deepika Panawennage. And Deepika is the parent of a military... I'm sorry, of middle and elementary school children. And she would like... She's got a couple of questions. One she'd like to know at what stage will we decide to go full remote as the COVID-19 cases are significantly increasing. And then she'd also like to know, are parents allowed to change their students from hybrid to fully remote anytime during the quarter?

Mr. Simons:

Answer to the first question, "When will we go for remote." Based on where the state is heading regarding the micro cluster strategy that we talked about, we would implement testing in order to continue to have in-person learning. So, unless the state took other actions to close us from a state perspective, regarding a strategy to stay open as long as we can. In the event that we cannot staff our school's classrooms to a degree that it becomes really problematic, we would close, hopefully, on a short term basis, wait for our staff to clear quarantine and come back and then reopen. But based on what we know about the state approach right now is the state is convinced that the schools being open is a good thing. That the data suggests that the school infection rate is much lower in schools than it is anywhere else.

Mr. Simons:

And we're going to strive to stay open for as long as we can. If we don't have enough bus drivers, for example, or we don't have enough teachers to cover classrooms, we may shift to full remote, individual building or district wide, depending on the magnitude of the shortage of staff. We're dealing with this every day. And we're striving to stay open and in some way, what's happening is students are returning from quarantine, coming back into the school. Staff is returning from quarantine, coming back in the school and just kind of shift in and out, going on right now, we're able to match it right now and we're striving right now.

Mr. Simons:

Our goal right now is to stay open till the holidays and then assess what happens after the holidays. But I'm not in favor of making a decision to call for remote unless we're absolutely unable to operate our current hybrid program. And yes, families have been provided with flexibility to shift to the full remote program or from the full remote program into in person. We made a shift of a number of families to put a second quarter. Since the cases have gone up, we've had flexible And for example, at high school, we've had a number of families, students going to full remote that we've accommodated.

Mr. Simons:

We've been having discussions about how to do that. Is there a point in time we let that go to full remote that we have to wait to come back in. And we're still having that discussion. We've been flexible over the course of the last month.

Ms. Wager:

Thank you. There are no other comments.

Mr. Buono:

We're going to move to the Board Forum. We'll start with JoAnn.

Ms. Taylor:

Thank you, Mike. I just wanted to share with everyone, Education Foundation is working with the Food for Families program [inaudible 02:20:17], and the backpack program. And we organized a staff food drive for the last couple of days. With the help of the transportation department, we collected the food today and the amount of food that came in to the room was just heartwarming. There was boxes and boxes. We probably are set with food for at least a month to feed our families. The bags were full, it was just incredible. Some cases of food came in, unopened case. [inaudible 02:20:56] were phenomenal. They were just so happy to help us. Just want to thank everyone. The staff that provided of the food, the administrators to help set it up at school. The transportation department who got it to us and Michael Leonard and Audra DiBacco who were there helping us today, it was just a very heartwarming experience and I'm happy to see that for our children.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, JoAnn. I move to Frank. He had to step out before. Anything? You're good. We'll go to, let's see, who can I go to next? Deanna? You're good. Kathleen? Kind of going around the virtual table. Mark?

Mr. Simons:

I'm good.

Mr. Buono:

You're good. John.

Mr. Dunn:

I'd like to go back to the budget.

Mr. Buono:

Sure.

Mr. Dunn:

And just make a comment. I was happy to hear Jeff, when you were talking about the budget, what the impact to COVID is having for our students in our program. I have a sense that we do have the data that, see if you lean that way, that we're going to have to spend some prioritize interventions. There's going to be some serious gaps with probably a larger portion of our student population. So I really appreciate your team is keeping an eye on. I think that's one of the important uses of our gathering, is to make these projections in long and forecast where we're going to be, because I really do think we're going to have to address this and the center part of that component. Have you heard anything from the governor's office? I know they're cutting monies, but if there'll be any grants or monies available for the big gaps in education as they arise.

Mr. Simons:

We have not heard anything regarding that other than today's conference. The budget director for the governor said that they are going to hold back, hold off on cutting the 20% until the end of the year. If they get federal monies, they won't cut to 20%. They're not going to do it during the middle of the year, they'll wait till the end of the year in hopes that the federal monies will come in. But we have not heard

of any additional monies being available provided for learning loss or academic intervention. And hopefully, hopefully with federal money coming, maybe that would be a part of the requirements.

Mr. Dunn:

All right, thank you for addressing those issues for us.

Mr. Buono:

And I think that that may be actually a good advocacy item for our superintendents. 'Cause we all have, as Jim said, it's a national issue and... Every district wealthy, not wealthy, rural, urban is having this issue at some level. I think that may be where we could advocate through MISBA and other sources to say these are priority areas for our schools, our kids.

Mr. Dunn:

One of the things that happened several years ago when the state was in really bad fiscal situations, prior to the GEA, right around that time is we had the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was ERRA funds. And some of those monies were dedicated to schools. And part of the money was used to save general fund positions in classrooms. And then part of the money flowed through the title one grants, title grants, and the special ed grants. So there is some precedent for federal monies falling to categorical aid grant type programs that provide support services for children. And you would hope that that might happen again.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, John.

Mr. Dunn:

I'm going to take a big step and start calling my representatives because I want to have this conversation now before it's, trying to stay out front of the curve. So I would encourage anyone who wants to take the time out to call John McDonald and the rest of the crew and let them know that our children are going to need some serious help from the future.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks John.

Mr. Buono:

Kathleen? Good. And Jennifer. You're good. All right. And everybody, I just want to say thank you for all your input, our next meeting isn't until mid-January, the 13th I believe. So I want to thank everyone for what they did with [inaudible 02:25:52] for the school. I want to wish everyone a wonderful holiday. I know it's been challenging. What we'll dealt with through the Thanksgiving holiday, seeing family members, not seeing, not seeing friends, making the sacrifices that we have to make to make sure that you all were remain safe and can do the things you do and get out of this pandemic at some point. So again, have a wonderful holiday. Thank you.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. McHugh is a humble man and he has forgotten to announce his good news. It's something that he has been working on for almost three years that has not found fruition and it's a positive shot in the arm for our district that I wanted to share and it's come from a lot of effort and conversation.

Mr. McHugh:

Yeah. In brief, a few years ago, we reached out to the University of Albany's Literacy Department, relentlessly emailed everybody in that department and called and left voicemails and finally, they got sick of the emails and the voicemails. Somebody returned my phone call. Mr. Simons, and I've had a few meetings over at the University of Albany with their faculty. Dr. Don Scanlan is well-known in regards to teaching literacy and she's famous for the interactive strategies approach to reading and in short that's a comprehensive approach to early intervention. There's a lot of comparison between research based versus research tested. In research based, usually carries with it money, right? Money's for a typical box program or teaching instructional materials. And internally, we started to review our primary instructional resources for reading, which accompany very large costs, upwards of a million dollars for some of those programs.

Mr. McHugh:

So, the interactive strategies approach is an approach to literacy instruction. It's not a program. It's not tied to any particular instructional materials. But it really focuses on the professional development of teachers. So, really increasing teacher's knowledge of their students, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of whatever the reading difficulties are and increasing knowledge on how to address those deficiency. So it's really about best plan and delivering effective literacy instruction, which is going to be vital, especially when we look at our universal screening data. But we have gotten the okay to have a collaborative initiative with the University of Albany's literacy department, Dr. Scanlan's coming out of retirement for this. We are looking to fund it through our title two part A monies, under instructional coaching. But the University of Albany's literacy department would be working with our teachers. That would be some direct instruction and more like a classroom setting, but also embedded support.

Mr. McHugh:

That's ongoing. It's not the one hit wonder, it's a ongoing. We hope to start in January and push it right through the end of the school year. The ultimate goal is that our teachers become so well-versed that they are, in essence, turnkey trainers for any new staff. So we're going to start with our remedial reading teachers but we've been in discussions. There's faculty that have been involved. There are two of our reading department chairs, our K-5 grade level content coordinator for AIS and RTI. Jennifer Sorenson Chase, our school psychologist, has been involved. And recently we reached out to Questar three and had the support of Karen Kohler and Terry Bordell so that we are able to sustain this. So, we did have monies earmarked under a title grant, what we want to sustain it. And we reached out to Questar to help support that down the road. So, it's really exciting. It's the first time that you ever see all these literacy departments ever had a collaborative effort with a public school. So, you challenged us with thinking outside of the box, and this was definitely thinking outside of the box. So nice new initiative.

Mr. Simons:

And I think it ties right into the fact that we're going to have kids coming back with greater needs. If we're getting professional development for our teachers to be able to address those literacy needs, it fits right in. And it is a unique partnership. Typically the university will work on a grant basis with more

of a higher needs district. They want to work with us because they were impressed by what we've done so far. And because of Mr. McHugh's persistence.

Mr. Buono:

That's great news. Appreciate all the efforts. It does pay off. Awesome. So with that, we do have need for executive session for a personnel matter. No business afterwards. And just want to, again, wish everyone a happy holiday. Thank you. Have a great night. We need five minutes for Peter to send you the link. But I need a motion to move into a bigger session. Jennifer second to Kathleen. All those in favor? All right. Thanks everybody. Have a good night.

PART 5 OF 5 ENDS [02:31:31]