

**Transcript of Special Board of Education Meeting
February 2, 2021**

Mr. Buono:

It's 6:30 pm, the Board meeting at Columbia High School, is being called to order. For attendance tonight, we have all Board members present. Seven Board members are attending virtually, myself and Frank are here in person, along with The Superintendent, Mr. Goodwin doing technical duties, and I appreciate that, Peter. And with that, we will rise and please join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Buono:

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 very much. So with tonight's special board meeting topic discussion is, as indicated at our meeting last Wednesday, that we have approval from the county to report on our sports, we got SED, and we discussed our plan, and this is going to formalize our plan. And I will turn over to the superintendent to discuss the topic.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you, Mr. Buono, good evening everybody, welcome board members, members of the administrative team, and members of the community who are participating through the livestream.

Mr. Simons:

Last Wednesday, we had a discussion item at our regular board meeting in which we talked about some of the planning and considerations related to the state's decision that we can now move forward with winter high-risk sports, subject to approval of the county.

Mr. Simons:

Rensselaer County Department of Health has approved and sent specifications to each of the respective districts in the county. And as I spoke of last week, the other counties have made decisions for themselves and for the districts that are within those counties, Albany County, Saratoga County and Schenectady County, those four counties, including Rensselaer, make up counties that have jurisdiction over the school district within the Suburban Council Meet in which we compete.

Mr. Simons:

So their measures and their approvals in those counties are different than Rensselaer County's. One of the things I want to mention is, we started a process to register our students over the weekend on the Monday and Tuesday in anticipation of this discussion. Simply due to the fact that we needed to get organized. Here, part of that organization is understanding how many students might be interested in playing. Secondly, and encouragingly, the seven-day rolling average in these particular counties that impact the Suburban Council, are going down.

Mr. Simons:

And you may recall a discussion that Albany County, Schenectady County and Saratoga County were adopting a standard of a 4% or lower infection rate. Right now, Rensselaer County's is 4.8, Saratoga's is 4.1, Schenectady's is 3.8, and Albany's is 5.3. So there is a real prospect that if the board approves the participation in athletics this evening and the coaching appointments, that we could be competing on a modified schedule for a shorter season, with our traditional opponents within that Suburban Council.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, the Rensselaer County school districts have been talking about alternatives in the event that Suburban Council schools are impacted by the infection rate criteria, and may not be able to participate.

Mr. Simons:

Some school boards have approved the participation during the last couple of days, I'm aware that Averill Park approved theirs. And Maple Hill, Schodack, approved theirs last night, as well as others, including some of the districts within the Suburban Council. I know specifically that Burnt Hills/Ballston Lake and North Colonie have plans to bring these items to their respective boards of education this week as well.

Mr. Simons:

So with all that being said, we have approval of the county, approval of the state. Our school physician and medical director, Dr. Albert, has reviewed our plan, which is being presented to the community and the board this evening. So we have all the required approvals at the state, county and local level, with the exception of board approval.

Mr. Simons:

So I'm going to turn the program over to Mr. Leonard. I'm going to ask Mr. Leonard to walk through the documents that are posted next to the item 3A. Mr. Leonard and other members of the administrative team, and Mr. Adam, worked with our coaches to put together a Return to Athletics document, which is modeled after the Suburban Council document, but we added our Rensselaer County criteria, as well as some other specific information regarding our [inaudible 00:05:08] plan to implement winter sports. Mr. Leonard.

Mr. Leonard:

Good evening, everybody, and thank you very much. This document, like Mr. Simon says, was a lot of work, with Sean Leggett, Natalie, the coaches. And we got a lot of this information from the New York State Public High School, their Return to Athletics document, as well as the New York State Internal Guidance for Sport and Recreation.

Mr. Leonard:

He's got it up. So if you go the page two real quick for our document. Basically, Governor Cuomo approved high-risk sports, and he kind of kicked it back to the local DOHs, and we got approval from Rensselaer County DOH about, I think it was 10 days ago. And we've been working pretty hard to try to get everything in line.

Mr. Leonard:

Our plan, if you go to page three, it starts, we took the Rensselaer County guidance that was outlined by County Executive Director Steve McLaughlin. And I just want to quickly go over a few things.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go down to the third bullet, in regards to spectators, we will be starting the season with no spectators. We have to get the season going, we have to figure out how we're going to set up everything. So we're going to start out our athletic season with no spectators. Within the first week I plan on doing senior nights, because that's most important. Each senior athlete will be able to bring two guests. And we'll do our typical senior night, which I think is important for everybody.

Mr. Leonard:

As the season goes on, we're going to evaluate it to see where we are, and hopefully phase in some spectators. It may just be two guests per athlete for each game. For instance, the JV game might have spectators down the road. After the JV game, those JV spectators will have to clear out, we have to do a lot of cleaning, then the Varsity.

Mr. Leonard:

So we want to get going first, and we want to start without spectators. We're also going to livestream our games, and that information will be coming out. It's going to be on SportsScope, it's an app, it's very easy. So we'll have very detailed directions on how to do that.

Mr. Leonard:

If you continue to go the page four, third bullet again. It's very important to realize that on a daily basis, all coaches and players will do a daily health screening. There's a form we developed back in the fall, and we implemented back in the fall, and it worked out extremely well. Everybody will get a temperature check, and they'll be asked our daily questions. And that is tracked on a weekly basis, then that tracking is handed in to the athletic office.

Mr. Leonard:

So we have temperature gauges, we have the daily health form. Very easy, very successful this fall. And I think we have 13 or 14 coaches that coached in the fall that will be coaching in the winter, so they're familiar with that.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go down to the very bottom, part of the county, I know that there are some questions about this. The very last bullet, I just want to read it. "At all times, it is recognized that the parents and guardians have the final say on whether a player competes in a contest or activity, and a player cannot be compelled or induced to play."

Mr. Leonard:

So we just got to make sure that, as I talked to the coaches last night at our coaches meeting, it was great, we had a lot of great questions, but you got to make sure, for example, a player's not feeling well, they shouldn't be there. But if all of a sudden they get anxious, they don't want to play, we can't pressure them in. So that's very important.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page five, basically our winter season will go from February first through Saturday March 13th, like Mr. Simon says, it's going to be a very condensed schedule. And depending on what schools are in will depend on who are going to be playing.

Mr. Leonard:

So for example, our games will start on Friday the 12th of February, and Saturday the 13th. So we'll be playing Schenectady County teams, because their rate is going down, and we anticipate playing them. If, for instance, Saratoga County is not in, or Albany County, we'll continue to play Rensselaer County teams. So we're going to continue to meet with some Rensselaer County schools, as well as Suburban Council. We have multiple meetings, every other day, to monitor who's in, who's out. But this way our goal is to try to get 10 to 14 game season.

Mr. Leonard:

All the cheerleading competitions will be held virtual. Originally if it's all Suburban Council, we haven't worked out to be at least a minimum of three virtual competitions, where three judges, I think it's three, will watch the routine, and judge the performance and rate it. And then they'll continue to watch other cheerleading programs' programs.

Mr. Leonard:

And then also other teams, Guilderland and Shen have already started doing virtual indoor track meets. You're not going to do all of the events, but some of the events we'll be able to do. Shotput, some high jump, some other events. And especially if it's nicer outside, depending on the day, we can also do some events.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go down to schedules, I just want to mention ice hockey. We do have our ice hockey team. It's a merged program with Shaker, Colonie, Tamarac and Averill Park. Currently we're on hold because both Shaker and Colonie are in Albany County. So we had a quick meeting today to discuss that. We're going to continue to wait to see if Albany County, that infection rate percentage continues to go down. And then hopefully we'll have some type of hockey season. Typically we have anywhere from four to six players from Columbia that are on that merged team.

Mr. Leonard:

Like I said, the play dates, we're going to be playing anywhere from three, maybe four boys and girls basketball games per week, depending on who's in, who's out. It's just at JV Varsity level at this time. And like I said, with cheerleading, we hope to get at least three, maybe four virtual competitions.

Mr. Leonard:

If you continue to go on page six, as Mr. Simons has mentioned, we started the registration, just to try to start this process going. Because obviously this whole entire thing is a six-week, condensed season, it's going to go very quick. I'm happy to say we started registration this Saturday. We did have 71 students and parents show up to start the registering process, and we'll continue to register the rest of this week. So some kids might not be cleared tomorrow, or even Thursday, but they'll get an opportunity to try out.

Mr. Leonard:

I think it's very important, a lot of the guidelines say you should be having a very reduced roster. And I think in hindsight of students' mental health, being able to participate in something, we'll most certainly look to maximize our participation in all of our sports, as well as maybe include one or two managers for those teams, to try to get a lot of our students involved. I think it's important. A lot of our students have been home for a long period of time. Some of them had limited participation in a lot of things, so we'll continue to work on our rosters and try to make sure that we have a max participation number. And I think it's very important for the overall wellbeing of all of our students.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page seven, we have something they call the Athletic Placement Process. That is for any seventh and eighth graders that pass the Athletic Placement Process. That is work through Sean Leggett, our athletic trainer. If they get approved and they get cleared through our medical director, Dr. Albert, then they're allowed to try out at an upper level. But they have to be approved first through the APP process. So I know Sean was in today, we're working through a lot of that paperwork to try to get some kids approved for various sports.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page eight, this gets into our main core, our guidelines, our safety procedures. Mandatory mask protocols. Masks have to be worn at all times. And if a student athlete, if they cannot tolerate it, they must provide a medical note to the school as to why they can't tolerate a mask. Everybody will be wearing a mask all the time. Coaches, players, whether they're playing in a game, they're on the sideline, they're sitting in their gym, everybody will have a mask on.

Mr. Leonard:

The difference, this got a little more restrictive through section two, this fall they kind of left it up to some teams as what's less tolerated. Well, some coaches didn't really buy into it, so some kids had their masks down on their chin, not covering their nose and mouths. So after a lot of controversy, section two made it more restrictive. I think it's a great rule. Our teams in the fall did a great job. We had boys and girls cross-country, running with masks on full-out, and they did a great job. All of our athletes in the fall did a great job.

Mr. Leonard:

So masks have to be worn all the time. We encourage all of our student athletes to carry an extra mask or two, and all of our coaches will also have extra all kinds of safety equipment, masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectant, rags, temperature gauges. So coaches will all have a whole safety box of equipment.

Mr. Leonard:

I've already talked about the daily health screening. All coaches and players will do a daily health screening. Locker rooms, we're not able to use the locker room. The only thing we're able to use the locker room for is outside the athletic wing, we have 55 red dots. Students after school come down, they stand on a red dot, we allow two to three students in a locker room just to change. They all have to take all their personal belongings with them to wherever they're going. So if they're going in the gym, they bring all their equipment in the gym. And then they're using lower bleacher. All the players' stuff has to be six feet apart spread across that lower bleacher. But that's the only time we can use the

locker room. Student athletes will use the bathroom in the front part of Columbia, so that's the only time we use the locker rooms.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page nine, I just think it's very important to talk about our practice guidelines. We got to make sure that all of our coaches take accurate attendance, and we use cohorts. So for example, our Varsity boys basketball team is a cohort. It might be a cohort of 15 players and two managers. But when Coach Sankey divides them up to the baskets and there's two players playing on a basket, so it might be myself and Mr. McHugh are assigned to a basket, he will have that cohort, that myself and Mr. McHugh were there doing shooting drills, dribbling drills, for 15 minutes, were in very close contact.

Mr. Leonard:

Similar to track, we might have all of our shotputters, our throwers we call them, Coach Dedrick coaches our throwers, our boys and girls throwers will be a cohort. That might be a cohort of 15, 16 student athletes, where Coach Dietrich has that group in a cohort. He'll do the temperature check, the screening, take attendance. So this way if there's an issue somehow on the throwing team, it's easy to contact trace those student athletes. So it's very important, we did a good job this fall.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go down the list, a lot of it is redundant from the fall. We want all of our athletes to take all their personal items all the time, they cannot leave them in a group, in a pile. They have to be spread out and separated. We ask that all of our student athletes, as well as our coaches, bring their own water, and their water bottle is labeled, so there's no sharing of any food, water, anything.

Mr. Leonard:

We ask that all of our student athletes bring in extra masks and their own individual hand sanitizer. We will also have hand sanitizers throughout all of our practices and game facilities. If you walk down the athletic wing now, there's about four big gallons spread out throughout our entire physical education wing and athletic wing.

Mr. Leonard:

We ask that there's no sharing of equipment. That could be clothes, pinnies, food. We ask that all of our student athletes, as soon as they leave practice they go home, they shower, and they clean all their practice equipment, practice jerseys, immediately. This way all these things, all these safeguards, lead our successful season.

Mr. Leonard:

We ask that when practice is over at 4:30, that all of our student athletes' rides are there, so we don't have a big group of student athletes waiting together. But the coach has to monitor that.

Mr. Leonard:

We will also be sanitizing equipment throughout practice and throughout competitions. So for example, during a basketball game, after the first quarter, halftime, third quarter, we'll rotate new basketballs, and the ones that were used by the team will get disinfected.

Mr. Leonard:

If you continue to go on page 10, game day guidelines. In your package there's a diagram what a basketball game might look like. We have to really spread out our benches. No longer can you have a bench of 17 people sitting shoulder to shoulder. They will actually be staggered six foot behind and six foot by six foot squares.

Mr. Leonard:

Each student and coach will be assigned a seat. There will be a sign that says Jim McHugh on the share. On that six by six square, Jim would leave all of his personal belonging, his water. If Jim gets subbed into the game for me, I can't go sit in Jim's chair, I will have my own designated chair to sit in to sit down. Our normal scorer table, we usually have anywhere from four to five people on our scorer table. That can no longer be. We'll have our announcer at one end, the scoreboard operator at the other end. And then six feet off of that table on both sides will be the home and away score bookkeeper.

Mr. Leonard:

So everything is very spread out. The officials used to leave their personal belongings right on the head score table. They will have their own table 12 feet past the score table where they can leave their personal belongings, their water. So even a basketball game will be very socially distant, be spread out.

Mr. Leonard:

Let's see. I just want to mention that working with the officials a lot, 50% of the girls basketball officials have opted out, as well as many of the boys officials have opted out. So we'll be working with the officials group to make sure that we have coverage for all of our games.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page 11, I will be working with any visiting team that comes to Columbia High School. Especially if it's a Suburban Council team, we've done this all fall. As well as we'll be doing this hopefully this winter, but we had the same expectations, that all teams arrive already changed, ready to go. They all have their face mask on. To start out the season, only anybody that's on the roster can come in the gym. There are no other guests allowed in the gym. They're able to go to their designated seating area. So their seating area also will be staggered. We'll have the away team labeled on benches.

Mr. Leonard:

Once the JV team is done, all those benches, all the chairs, will be cleaned and disinfected. The JV team will all have to leave, and then the Varsity team can come in. It worked out very well in the fall, and I expect it to work as well in the winter.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page 12, it just talks about our athletic training services. Any student athletes that is in need of athletic trainer, Sean Leggett, the best way to do it is email him. No longer can we have 10, 15 people down in Sean's room. It worked out extremely well, the students will email him, and he'll get back into his whole schedule to see all the students, or he'll go to that practice to check on that student. But it worked out really well.

Mr. Leonard:

At this time, there are and concessions whatsoever. Again, we don't want any spectators or guests. There was a question that came up about media. The media can contact my office ahead of time, give me their name and number. When they enter, they will also have to be temperature checked, and do the daily health form to enter our gymnasium for a game.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page 13, for away contests right now, we're only allowed to have 22 people ride the bus at one time. When we have a team ride the bus, they'll be assigned seats. So a player will sit in the same seat to and from a game, that's very important. Again, tracking cohorts, assigned seating, we don't mix anybody up. And that worked out extremely well in the fall. A lot of our coaches took a photo of where each player sat to help them out, and that worked out well as well.

Mr. Leonard:

If you go to page 14, I just want to make sure that if there is a positive test of any kind of COVID-19, they'll notify Mr. Simons, Mr. Harkin, Sean Leggett, Jill Barker, Karen Vincent, our COVID coordinator, and myself, to begin contact tracing right away.

Mr. Leonard:

I'm not sure if anybody has any questions at this time. But we reviewed this with all the coaches last night. They asked some great questions, they continue to ask great questions. We got a great group of coaches that very care a lot. They know the importance of getting our kids going. And they're all in. It's going to be a very, very quick, very intense six weeks. It's already been a very intense 10 days or so, but everybody's working hard.

Mr. Leonard:

I do want to thank the board of education, Mr. Simons, Mr. McHugh, a lot of the other administrators, Sean Leggett, Natalie Young, for working very hard to get this thing going. Because there's a lot of paperwork, background things that have to be done and completed, and all the compliance.

Mr. Leonard:

I'm not sure if anybody has any questions, or back to you, Mr. Simons.

Mr. Simons:

I think that's a good opportunity for board members who might have specific questions about the plan to ask them. And then we'll ask Mr. Bickel afterwards to talk about the cleaning and disinfectant schedule that will be supporting the practice schedule and the game schedule. So if the board has any questions, now is the opportunity.

Mr. Buono:

Mike, question on away games.

Mr. Leonard:

Yeah.

Mr. Buono:

In regards to other schools that were talking about high-risk sports now. Are you confident that other Suburban Councils, and whatever league we play in away, that there will be consistency in the guidelines, the application of those guidelines?

Mr. Leonard:

Yeah, I'm pretty confident, especially with Suburban Council. We've been pretty much on the same board throughout the entire fall. This doctrine is kind of from the Suburban Council, the one that we started working on the Friday night that we learned that it was passed. We constantly communicate with each other. If there's an issue at a game, we call up each other and try to find out and troubleshoot what's going on.

Mr. Leonard:

But I'm very confident in all the schools, especially in our league, of how they're going to treat our student athletes, how they're going to take care of our student athletes. And that's been something, Mike, I can tell you, I've been here for a long period of time, that it's a really nice thing about our league and our fellow schools in our league, that they help everybody out and they take care of things.

Mr. Leonard:

And that diagram that you have, the so-called basketball diagram, they all want to do the same thing, the right thing, so we're all successful. Because if somebody's not successful, that means more of us might be unsuccessful. So I'm very confident in all the schools that we play in. Even if it's a Rensselaer County school, I will make sure that they have all those safeguards. And a lot of them are using our document that we have that we've developed. To be honest with you, they've asked for a lot of these documents that we have.

Mr. Buono:

Great. So two things. official question, let's go back quickly, I know that's been an issue. I've heard concerns too about officials do not want to participate because of COVID concerns. Do you think you can overcome that?

Mr. Leonard:

I do. I think that when we run into some snags, say if we have a basketball game scheduled on a Tuesday, and we have inclement weather, school's closed, and that game is moved to a Wednesday, we might have an issue. Because other leagues' other games have been scheduled.

Mr. Leonard:

We're pretty proactive as far as our league and our schedule. We've already sent out our games for the 12th and 13th to be scheduled. I think you'll see, Mike, a lot of the JV officials will also do the Varsity game. I think they're looking at pairing a seasoned veteran, high-level Varsity, with a JV official, so this way you'll have more consistency. And then we'll have to just work around it.

Mr. Leonard:

I feel that there's enough. But also too, you're not playing, a lot of people aren't doing modified, some people are only doing Varsity. So that also helps in that case.

Mr. Buono:

Good to hear. I think the plan is excellent, I think it's very thorough, and it's good to hear that other schools are looking at this as a template for you. So kudos to the team who put this together, and Mike, for that.

Mr. Buono:

And also I do appreciate too the fact that you're going to do another increase the roster size, I think maximizing the opportunity for our student athletes, and maybe juniors and seniors who haven't seen a sport in a long time, or last chance at a sport as a senior, I appreciate you making that effort to maximize those rosters and take the precautions so they can participate. So thank you. Any other questions from the board members on the protocols and then the plan?

Mr. Buono:

I see a lot of no. So I think that's it for questions to you or to Mr. Simons if there's some follow-up. But appreciate your time, thank you very much.

Mr. Leonard:

Yeah, by all means. Anything, please ask myself or Mr. Simons. Thank you.

Mr. Simons:

Yeah.

Mr. Buono:

I think Paul Bickel is out there. And Paul, give us a general overview of the cleaning and disinfecting schedule for Columbia High School, which is here and we also have a schedule to work Goff, and Green Meadow, which are the three basic sites that we'll be operating the program. Paul?

Mr. Bickel:

Sure. The biggest thing that we have to look at is the usage. And usage at Columbia will be higher than the Gough and Green Meadow. So we're aware of that. I worked Jim VanBuren, the head custodian for Columbia, and we decided we needed to put some people back in positions that they originated from prior to the COVID changes, help with the coverage.

Mr. Bickel:

So originally we had an individual that worked Tuesday through Friday, and also worked Saturday mornings. Because of COVID, he had been pulled onto a Monday through Friday night shift. So we're shifting him back to his regular schedule, started this week actually. And in his place on Monday night we're bringing in a substitute that would work to fill in that shift. So that basically fills us back to where we were prior to the pandemic starting.

Mr. Bickel:

We're also taking somebody, one of our night custodians that was on the third shift, and they got moved up to the second shift for the pandemic, so we're moving that particular person back to the night shift. That will help with the overnight cleaning after games and practices.

Mr. Bickel:

Also decided that it would be a good idea to bring one additional substitute custodian on 40 hours a week, working Monday through Friday nights from 3:30 to midnight, just to help out with the extra cleaning and disinfecting that could come up. Especially with the high school, I know they run through the hallways a lot and things like that, so this will give us more coverage in that area.

Mr. Bickel:

As far as Green Meadow goes, we felt fairly confident that we have enough people in place to do what we have to do there. The majority of what we are going to need to do is just cleaning and disinfecting the mats prior to and after practices. As you heard from Mike, he's already got a pretty good grasp on the cleaning and disinfecting during the practices. So we just have to take it from there.

Mr. Bickel:

And that's something we can do very easily with the new Gen Eon misters that we use. They mist out, and within 10 minutes everything is disinfected, and that includes COVID. That was one of their key sell points, and why we purchased a lot of that equipment early on.

Mr. Bickel:

Goff will be mostly basketball, like Mr. Leonard said. They won't be using the locker rooms at both Goff and the high school, which makes cleaning and disinfecting a lot easier on us. A lot of what can be done at Goff will be floor cleaning with our floor scrubber, and also using the misters around the perimeters.

Mr. Bickel:

We do have some need to have some coverage for upcoming Saturdays at Goff and Green Meadow. So far, Mr. Leonard called me the next two weekends. But even if that persists beyond that, we're filling that with overtime from existing custodians at each of the buildings.

Mr. Bickel:

So I feel very confident that we have good coverage. And along with Mr. Leonard's plan to disinfect during games and practices, we should be in really good shape to disinfect prior and after games and practices.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, Paul. Any questions for Mr. Bickell? Board members? Sounds like a very thorough plan, good coverage. And of course we'll adjust or pivot if we have to. So if no questions, we'll move on to the next part.

Mr. Simons:

So next we have public forum, and I think Peter is going to help us with that. I mean we moved the public forum to the middle of the meeting, so members of the public could hear the presentation.

Mr. Goodwin:

There are no emails at this time.

Mr. Simons:

Okay.

Mr. Buono:

I do also want to mention, Mr. Simons did include that our medical director, Dr. Albert, has been involved in this process the whole time. The community may remember the virtual forum, and Dr. Albert also participated in that forum, and talked about a lot of the things that are happening with schools. And we appreciate the support in working through what was put together, and making sure that our schools and kids and the student athletes are safe, as well as our staff and coaches.

Mr. Simons:

So on the regular business agenda, we have a resolution to approve a sports as listed. And that resolution, I wrote it, and I had Don [Webbin 00:35:01], our attorney, review it. And he said that it was good. I added today Dr. Albert's approval. So we have the state approval, the issuance of the guidance from both the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Public High School Association. We have the approval of the County Executive and the Public Health Director for Rensselaer County. And the Medical Director Dr. Kevin Albert district [inaudible 00:35:31] just referenced. And then assurances from me as the superintendent of schools that I and our administration will follow all New York State, Rensselaer County and all health and safety requirements at all practices and games.

Mr. Simons:

And our other statement, the sports, that at this time we feel confident we can implement. It does leave the question regarding wrestling. We've had some discussions within our administration, among other districts and our district. And we've talked with Coach Servidone a little bit about some options that could possibly at least give our wrestlers an opportunity to have something practice and drills. We're still looking at that issue. Mr. McHugh and Mr. Leonard are talking about it with the coach, and probably at Wednesday's meeting we'll discuss wrestling a little bit further, but we're not comfortable yet recommending any programs at this time.

Mr. Buono:

Okay, very good.

Mr. Simons:

But we don't want to leave them out either, so we are considering the student athletes that are very interested in this.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. And I know that was mentioned in the plan, and I mentioned myself, that wrestling is an ongoing sport that we're evaluating, and I appreciate people's patience to let us work through some of the details to make sure we can do that sport safely for our student athletes to participate. But we do want to try to do as many of the sports as we can, including wrestling. We'll just keep working on that.

Mr. Buono:

Any questions on the resolution? Or for Mr. Simons or Mr. Leonard? One last chance. Comment. Peter, no public comment has come in?

Mr. Goodwin:

No, sir.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. So with that, seeing no questions or no further comments, I'll just read the resolution quickly.

Mr. Buono:

Resolved, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, the Board of Education of the East Greenbush Central School District hereby approves that winter high-risk sports, according to the New York State Department of Health regulations and guidance, the motion to approve that. John, I need a second... Kathleen. All those in favor? All right. All those opposed? None. All right. This motion approved, sports, and is passed.

Mr. Buono:

So congratulations, Mike. I think it's a great effort on the team part, and I wish you guys all the best of luck as you pursue the sports. Looking forward to seeing kids down on the strip. So keep us posted.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. Buono, before with move to the next item, can I ask Mr. Goodwin another question, are you able to see how many people are on the livestream?

Mr. Goodwin:

Yes. If you look at the top of the screen, it will tell you. Like right now 15. Minus one from me.

Mr. Simons:

Okay. So one comment I want to make. There has been some discussion about the approval to go to high-risk sports while we're still considering what we might do to increase in-person learning at the elementary school level.

Mr. Simons:

We know that the infection rates associated with the holiday surge, so to speak, are coming down now. We started discussions within our administrative team last week, revisiting the options for bringing more students in at the lower grade levels. We are going to be sharing some information with our teachers' union on Thursday regarding some of the considerations that we're thinking about. And we hope to bring an idea and a plan to the board at next Wednesday's meeting.

Mr. Simons:

So we're moving forward on this because we're able to, and the recommendations provide us with the opportunity to do that. There's a different set of regulations that govern what we can do in terms of the number of students that we are able to have in our classrooms. But we are working on that as well, and we hope to have some recommendations for the board at Wednesday's regular board meeting. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Mr. Simons, do you want to speak to a little bit about the things you heard about the testing of athletes and things like that?

Mr. Simons:

One of the other items that we're working on is, while testing on student athletes is not required by the county nor the state, we do have access to tests that were purchased by Questar BOCES, based on an understanding and the requirements that we were going to have if we were in a micro-cluster.

Mr. Simons:

Today we had a meeting with Mr. Leonard, Mr. McHugh, Molly McGrath, myself, Marissa Cannon, and Dr. Albert, among which to talk about how we might implement a testing program to go above and beyond the state and country requirements. We haven't come to any final determinations on that yet, there's a lot to it in terms of the compressed schedule. We have about 1,600 tests available to us at this point, and maybe access to more. And we're trying to figure out, if we were to put a testing component in place, how frequently we would do it, what percentage of kids would we test, and how we would practically make sure that we do it safely, and time the testing around the busy schedule that we're going to have in terms of potentially three games a week, and practices every day.

Mr. Simons:

So we are discussing it. We might have a recommendation on Wednesday, it might be we have a plan to come forward with. It might be that we determine that it wasn't feasible but we are working on it.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. So we should have a plan in place in case other schools do it, or there's some reason to do it. So thank you for pursuing that, we appreciate it.

Mr. Buono:

So we'll now move to item 5B, instructional support personnel memo. We have our winter athletic coaches to be appointed, and also our volunteer coaches. Any comments, Mr. Simons or Miss Cannon?

Mr. Simons:

Board members, any comments?

Ms. Cannon:

None at this time.

Mr. Simons:

One thing I will point out, and I support Mr. Leonard's recommendation, while we are not fielding a freshman team, we're asking the board to appoint an additional coach for basketball at freshman level for boys and girls. Those coaching titles and stipends are in the contract, but those coaches would be assigned to assist the varsity and the JV teams with all of the pre-game, during the game and after the game requirements, demands and safety protocols. So it's an extra coach to help out with the unique situation that we're in right now.

Mr. Buono:

Okay, very good. And now we'll go to ... Miss Taylor, you got your hand raised?

Ms. Taylor:

I do. I just wanted to say, because my husband is listed on this memo, I will be abstaining. But I want to say that I am in full support of all the coaches on this memo.

Mr. Buono:

Very good, thank you for that. Any last comments or questions? If not, we need a motion to approve the coaching and volunteer coaching deployments. I see Jennifer, I need a second. Frank. All those in favor? All those opposed? All those abstaining? One, very good. Thank you, Joanne.

Mr. Buono:

I just want to thank the coaches, the staff, for taking this on. I know it's a big endeavor, a lot different than what we're used to for our coaches. They did it in the fall, we're doing it again this winter group, and I'm sure the spring, and we'll do something similar. And then best wishes for a successful season. I'm really happy for our student athletes and our students who will see their peers to be able to play sports and watch them, whether it's live, or hopefully at some point in person. I'm sure the parents are very happy too. So thank you very much.

Mr. Buono:

Is there any other board business that has to be done tonight?

Mr. Simons:

Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. Anybody have any final comments. Typically we do a second public forum, Peter, any emails?

Mr. Goodwin:

There are no emails.

Mr. Buono:

No emails, no comments. We've about 20 participants, I think, watching the livestream.

Mr. Goodwin:

It was 14.

Mr. Buono:

14? Okay. All right. It does say executive session after meeting, but we do not need an executive session tonight. So with that, I need a motion to adjourn. Joanne, second?. Michelle or somebody different? There we go. All those in favor? All right.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, everybody. Have a great night, I appreciate you coming in and doing the special meeting in support of our kids. So take care, have a good evening. Thank you.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you.

Mr. Leonard:

Thank you, everybody.

Mr. Simons:

Thanks, Michael.