

The Board of Education

Town of Brooklyn
119 Gorman Road
Brooklyn, CT 06234

Mae Lyons, Board Chair
Keith Atchinson, Secretary
Tana Jolley

Melissa Perkins-Banas, Vice-Chair
Justin Phaiah
Carolyn Hackbarth

Mission: The Brooklyn Schools will foster a drive for learning within each student to reach his/her greatest potential. To achieve this mission, the school will continually improve its educational programs and services to meet this community's expectations for a quality education for all.

The Brooklyn Board of Education held a special meeting virtually on July 13, 2020 via Zoom. In attendance were Mrs. Lyons, Dr. Perkins-Banas, Mr. Atchinson, Mr. Phaiah, Mrs. Hackbarth, and Mrs. Jolley arrived at 7:09 p.m. Mrs. Buell, Superintendent, Mr. Otto, Board of Finance, and many staff members and public were also present.

Any questions or comments can be shared with the Board of Education following the meeting through email: boe@brooklynschools.org or buell@brooklynschools.org

1. Attendance, Establishment of a Quorum, Call to order

Quorum established. Mrs. Lyons called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. Review of District Reopening Plan

Mrs. Buell introduced the new Special Education Director, Barbara-Jean Toth, who was a special education teacher in Plainfield.

Mrs. Buell stated that the cost estimate survey needs to be submitted to the State of Connecticut by Friday, July 17, 2020, and the District's plan needs to be submitted to the State of Connecticut by Friday, July 24, 2020. Our next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 22, 2020.

Mrs. Buell stated the plan is to return school, all students return to school in all districts on a regular schedule. The direction is being provided to all districts by the Governor and Commissioner of Education to plan for a full reopening. They were told to create three plans: Full Reopening, Hybrid, and Distance/Remote Learning. All these plans are contingent on what happens with the virus, covid-19. The Commissioner of Education has provided goals/guidance to follow, some are requirements, some are guidance that are provided to districts that should be considered. Mrs. Buell shared the Adapt, Advance,

Achieve document from the State of Connecticut with the Board, staff, and the community that has guidance on the parameters of returning to school. She stated that she's had many conversations with parents, staff, the Board of Education, paraprofessionals, nurses, town offices, Brooklyn Parks and Recreation that have brought us to where we are currently. Our plan isn't written as of yet. There has been a lot of work and planning put into place.

Mrs. Buell stated she has spoken to many superintendents, they're excited to bring students back to school safely. The Adapt, Advance, Achieve document from the state has many resources. Mrs. Buell continued to discuss the plan with having all students, all day in school. We're scaling up to open up, and there will be a plan in place to scale down for a hybrid model, if the virus becomes more prevalent in our area. When we go to the hybrid model, it will be in conjunction with the Department of Health. The hybrid model will be AABB type of schedule, half of your class comes on Monday, Tuesday, half the class comes Wednesday, Thursday, and all students will be distance learning on Friday. Most districts are working on this model and Mrs. Buell stated she would like to work with our designated high schools, so we're on a similar schedule. The distance learning model will be improved, plans are in place to improve.

Mrs. Buell stated that our priorities are to create healthy learning environments through protocols and cohorts. Cohorting is limiting the number of students that are potentially sharing germs. If there are 20 students in a first grade classroom, you're potentially sharing germs. If we can cohort those students and keep them together as much as possible without going to specials/related art classes, or the cafeteria and being around 60 or 80 other students and one student becomes sick, then that cohort can be managed. The cohort will minimize the transmission of germs and also for contact tracing. Students have at least three school related cohorts; morning bus cohort or Brooklyn Parks and Recreation before school cohort, classroom cohort, and an afternoon bus cohort or Brooklyn Parks and Recreation after school cohort. We are trying to limit cohorts and the mixing of cohorts in order to manage tracing if people begin to get sick.

Mrs. Buell stated another priority is connecting with students again. Students and staff have been home for a long time. We need to return and build connections with students and be able to assess how they are doing. In order to educate students, we need to connect with them first. We need to address the social emotional needs of our students. There are specific plans in place to work on the social emotional needs through the mental health/wellness group that met and will be using the MindUp curriculum that will help to address and connect with our students.

Mrs. Buell stated that we need to address the overall wellness, equity, diversity, and social justice. We need to continue to create a culture in the Brooklyn Public Schools of a caring and kind culture. She stated we have a great school system, but not everything is equitable and that is a goal to achieve higher equity and to address some of things that students had to endure being home including some of the things that have happened in our country.

Mrs. Buell stated that we need to increase our digital literacy. If we should enter into a more distant learning situation, our students will be prepared. Part of our plan as we enter into the school year is to make sure students know how to log into their different programs, and address some of the technology gaps that students may have. We will be sensible with assessments with students. End of year assessments were missed, we don't know where students ended the year last year. Assessments will not be done right away, We will connect with students and assess how students are doing emotionally and how they're feeling. The academic assessments will come and will be dealt with in a rational way; not a first priority.

She stated some of the healthy school protocols will be working with the Department of Health. There's already been some conversations happening and there's a meeting later this week. They are following the CDC guidelines. We will be social distancing, being six feet apart or do the best you can to achieve the greatest social distancing. Students on a bus can be near capacity. Parents were surveyed and encouraged parents to transport their children if possible to help provide more social distancing on the bus. In the classroom we will maximize social distancing, conservatively to create healthy classrooms and learning environments. Masks will be worn all day for staff and students that completely covers their nose and mouth when inside the school building. There will be mask breaks in the morning, lunch/recess, and in the afternoon. We will continue good hygiene practices. She stated that at the end of the school year, they had purchased touchless sinks, and touchless paper towel dispensers in the larger bathrooms. The hand dryers will be disconnected due to the spread of germs.

Mrs. Buell stated that there will be logging who comes and goes from classrooms for contact tracing. If someone becomes ill in a classroom and we need to do contact tracing, we need to know who has been in that classroom. We will be limiting the visitors coming in and out of the building. People will be allowed in the building only if they have a specific purpose to be there. Meetings will be held virtually to limit the number of people coming into the building. Anyone entering the building, needs to respect social distancing and be wearing a face mask.

Mrs. Buell stated she has purchased desk shields, which are dividers that students can put around their desk. The dividers have a window so that students can see the teacher and each other while using it. When students take their mask off for lunch, it will lessen the spread of germs. Dividers will be provided for teachers and staff so that they can speak behind the divider as well.

She stated there will be enhanced cleaning in high traffic areas, and bathrooms. Currently we have one daytime custodian and in order to sustain additional cleaning, we will be needing to add an additional custodian to the day shift. There will be limited foot traffic in places that are heavily traveled. For example: the office, mailboxes will be moved to each classroom; the nurses office, if someone needs a change of clothes, we will get the clothes and bring them back to the classroom. Every student doesn't need to be going into

the nurses office. There will be no more temperature checks of every person or student that enters the building, as we originally thought. We do have a large quantity of touchless thermometers. Each of the schools will have a quarantine/isolation area. If we suspect someone is ill and has covid symptoms, there will be a sectioned off area for the student until a parent picks the student up. If parents are coming to pick up the students, we will meet the parent at the door to dismiss the child.

As part of the plan, we are looking at the facilities, looking at ventilation and the cleaning routines.

Mrs Buell stated there was a survey sent out to families on how they feel about sending their child back to school and how many will be willing to transport. We're trying to figure out how many parents are comfortable with sending their child back to school. We are still gathering data on these questions. Parents have a choice: they can choose to send their child back to school, they can choose to homeschool and use the curriculum that the school district uses. Lessons will be pre-recorded and children will get the work/lessons through online learning remotely and support will be provided as needed. It will not be live broadcasting lessons from the classroom, it is pre-recorded. We're trying to have an initial status of how many students may or may not return to school that needs to be reported to the state on Friday, July 17, 2020.

Mrs. Buell stated there was a survey sent to staff as well. We need to have an initial status of how many staff members that have specific covid criteria that might find it difficult to return to work that also needs to be reported to the state on Friday, July 17, 2020. Some staff may not be able to return under these conditions. We're trying to assess now. Once the reopening plan is written, it will be sent to everyone and then get more specific information on who is ready to return.

When planning the reopening plan, we have to follow the teacher's contracts, and paraprofessional contracts. We're having conversations with food services through EASTCONN on what meals will look like. Right now it's grab and go breakfast, and delivering meals into the classrooms for lunch. Whether you're in school, homeschooled, hybrid, or fully distance learning, we are obligated to offer meals under any circumstance to all students. If you choose to homeschool your child using Brooklyn's curriculum, you can come to the school and pick up the meals. We're thinking about how to deliver meals from the cafeteria to classrooms safely and keeping it warm. There may be more cold options for lunch and sides, maybe limited hot chicken sandwiches or burger and the sides will be cold. There's a possibility of applying for The Seamless Summer Meals again, that's what we operate under right now where anybody gets a meal. When we go back to school, each student has to be accounted for that takes a meal.

Mrs Buell gave an overview of what some of the specials and related arts classes will look like. For example: Art, the art teacher will deliver art via Zoom into all the first grade classes at the same time. All students will have art, the art teacher will be in their classroom and the classroom teacher will be in the classroom with the students helping to

implement the art lesson. The same will happen for PE and music classes. Everytime a teacher goes into a cohort, it increases the transmission possibilities. Also, using the Zoom option at the middle school, for example, the math teacher for each grade level will zoom into all classes for that grade at the same time. The same will happen for each of the classes. For teachers to get to know all the students, at the end of the first week, the group of students from one class, will move to the next teacher. The goal is to connect with the students in a short period of time in the event we should have to return to distance learning.

A recommendation is to have bus monitors on the bus due to students needing to wear masks on the bus. We will have someone on the bus with masks if someone forgets a mask, they will help with seating in the back first and move forward as the bus fills to prevent students crossing over each other, they will dismiss the first seats and move backward when unloading.

Mrs. Buell discussed decreased class sizes. We don't have to have ten students in a class, but we do have some challenges with some grade levels. It'll depend on how many students return to school and how many don't. There are 4 grade levels that are tight, grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. There isn't enough space to social distance as much as we can and we have to have class sizes that can grow and shrink to be safe and manageable. If a student starts off with homeschooling and then returns to school, we have to plan for them to return. We will be asking for 48-72 hours notice to prepare for a safe return. She is going to ask the Town and the Board to spend extra money to hire 4 extra teachers for grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 to accommodate class sizes that will be safe and manageable.

Mrs. Buell stated that student schedules need to be discussed. Currently our instructional day is 8:30-3:15. Within the instructional day, teachers have planning periods and lunch that is part of their contract that the school has to meet. Under the reopening model we have, we will not be able to meet the contractual requirements or obligations for planning periods, team time, and lunches. Mrs. Buell is proposing to have a later start to the day, or shortening the school day, by 45 minutes. Teachers will be able to have their planning period or team time during that 45 minutes. It will also free up time for the paraprofessionals to ride the bus as monitors. The instructional time will be decreased by 45 minutes. We are aware that it will impact parents to drop kids off at school. She has spoken with Brooklyn Parks and Recreation about enhancing Brooklyn Parks and Recreation by adding time for the before and after school program and also helping staff Brooklyn Parks and Recreation with some paraprofessionals. She stated that they've also discussed where and how to house the before and after school program to maintain safety and social distancing. She also stated to maintain social distancing, 4th grade will be moved to the old 3rd grade wing; currently 3rd and 4th grade are in the same wing. Space could be utilized in the cafeteria for Brooklyn Parks and Recreation or in the gym, since they won't be used.

Mrs. Buell stated the Board may need to consider updating policies:

- Adding face masks during pandemic conditions when the CDC requires it, both for staff and for students.
- Change in school day will still meet the requirement of 180 days or 900 hours, both locally and state perspective
- The Board should look at the building use. Currently, we permit outside groups (Boy Scouts, Brooklyn Parks and Recreation, etc) to use the building at no cost. We need to think about the impact of other groups using the building, rooms need to be cleaned before going in and after they leave. There will be additional cleaning time for our custodians and we need to make sure that we can afford it.
- We made need to have a travel/quarantine advisory policy. Currently, there is a travel/quarantine advisory for people that come from out of state if they traveled out of state in particular areas. She believes we will need to have a policy around that and CAGE and Shipman & Goodwin are coming up with sample policies. It may not need to be a policy, just part of the employee handbook.

Mrs. Buell wanted to discuss preschool. It is hard to social distance preschoolers. It's hard to not share things. We can't guarantee sanitizing everything before another student touches something. The class size for preschoolers is 14 students.

Mrs. Buell would like the Board to consider the school calendar and trading a professional day. In order to offer distance learning at an improved level, there needs to be additional PD time for teachers with some of the new guidelines. She is suggesting trading February 6, 2021 PD to maybe the 2nd week of school.

Mrs. Buell wanted to mention the Brooklyn Business Association has offered to do a local collection in the community for items the school might need. Mrs. Buell stated that if art is taught to 4 or 5 classes at the same time, the art supplies might want to be kept in that cohort. We could be in need of art supplies. We will provide masks, on an as needed basis. If there are families or community members that would like to sew masks, it might be nice for every child to have a handmade mask. Mrs. Buell does have paper masks and she did order neck gaiters that have Brooklyn Public Schools on them. The Brooklyn Business Association has offered to sell them in the community as well.

Questions from the Board:

Mrs. Hackbarth stated she didn't have any questions. She wanted to let Mrs. Buell know that she has done a great job of thinking about all the possibilities and different solutions and explaining everything. She may have questions later on.

Mr. Atchinson stated that Mrs. Buell has done an amazing job and we're fortunate to have her leading the district through all of this. He asked if we will be doing temperature checks with a thermometer for people coming into the schools. Mrs. Buell stated it's not in our plan, it's not a requirement, but it can be added to our plan. Mr. Atchinson stated he knows it's not a feel safe kind of thing, but when you're going into a doctor's office, they're checking temperatures. Mrs. Buell stated we have gloves, face masks, face shields, and touchless thermometers. She'll add it to the plan.

Amanda Kinney, community member, started to ask a question about how recess was going to happen with students. Mrs. Buell stated to Mrs. Lyons that the question is targeted toward the Board members. Are we entertaining questions from the general public or just the Board members? There is no Public Comment section in this meeting. Mrs. Buell stated that she can take the questions and prepare responses for them. Mrs. Lyons stated that they can email questions, we aren't prepared to respond tonight and can be addressed at the regular Board meeting on July 22, 2020. General public questions can be emailed to buell@brooklynschools.org.

Mrs. Perkins-Banas wanted to ask a question about the next Board meeting. At the last meeting Mrs. Buell stated we may need to meet earlier. In light of the considerations she presented to the Board, Mrs Perkins-Banas is requesting that they meet an hour earlier than the scheduled time, we may need that additional time to review those considerations and Board policies. Mrs. Buell stated that they can schedule that, we'd need to check the availability of the full Board. Mrs. Buell anticipates that most of the plan will be written, so there won't be time for edits after July 22, 2020, that's why the Special Board meeting was held tonight.

Mrs. Perkins-Banas had another question on the containment and isolation area, who will be staffing it and limit the level of exposure to people who are staffing it? Someone may present with consistent symptoms of covid, how do you determine that it has been an affected area and do you have a protocol for that now or still working on it? Mrs. Buell stated that they were talking about this back in March with the school nurses before school closed. They have identified a certain area adjacent to their office area. If a child feels sick, he/she will go to that area and be assessed and then sent home from that area. Nurses will be monitoring. We do have PPE (gloves, gowns, masks, shields, and goggles). She has a meeting with the Department of Health later this week to discuss protocols with them.

Mrs. Lyons had a question and a concern. She's thinking about paraprofessionals riding on the buses and then going into classrooms that we're trying to keep somewhat isolated. Some paras go into many classrooms or different grade levels, they seem like they would be vulnerable people or potential carriers. How can we limit that? Mrs. Buell stated that as they make assignments, there will be fewer paras going to other classrooms. Every adult and child is being taken into consideration when creating cohorts. The principals are making sure when making the assignments that the same para is in the same classroom covering the same lunch coverage.

Mrs Lyons had a concern about changing policy. Could it be a special addendum for this school year, for masks and shortening of the day so when we are ready to go back to normal we aren't changing the policy again. Mrs. Buell stated it can be under pandemic conditions. We'll look at sample policies and we may choose a handbook that will reflect the changes. Mrs. Lyons asked when do we need to do this by before the 24th? Mrs. Buell stated that it would be before we return to school.

Mrs. Buell wanted to discuss costs that have been spent and future costs. There's the Cares Act funding that will be coming through, not sure how much the school will receive, the Town is getting \$179,000 and she hopes they can use some of that to help with social emotional needs, PD and curriculum materials, and ensuring equitable access through distance learning with hotspots for children that don't have connectivity. They purchased additional smartboards for live zooming into classrooms. We have spent approximately \$50,000 that will be submitted for reimbursement through FEMA. Mrs. Buell stated the items they've purchased so far: masks, sanitizing stations, gloves, desk shields, faucets, water fountains to fill water bottles. Prek and kindergarten will have little towels for their own personal space to help with social distancing. We also purchased additional chromebooks, bought the zoom license, additional office furniture so people don't lean over your desk and plexiglass.

Additional Costs:

- Additional teachers - \$223,000
- Custodian support - 47,000
- Additional PPE, face shields, see through face masks for students to see mouths, disposable masks and gloves, hand sanitizer.
- Sealant product to seal surfaces so it will kill the virus when it lands on the surface.
- Bluetooth supplies for recording lessons.

Mrs. Buell is anticipating the costs for the above items to be approximately \$340,000. There are one and a half positions that haven't been filled, a technology position and a part-time math interventionist. Mrs. Buell stated that these are all things that should be discussed with the Town. They are safe decisions to make for the school community.

Mrs. Lyons asked the process to hire teachers, we need to go through the town? If we need new teachers, we need to do it soon. Mrs. Buell stated that she's not sure when the Board of Finance will be meeting next.

Mr. Otto wanted to mention that when Mrs. Buell mentioned talking to the town officials about additional funding, you will need to talk to the taxpayers through a town meeting to be approved. We'll have to see how sympathetic the taxpayers will be with these additional expenditures, especially with the plan that the school has chosen to operate in that utilizes the existing teacher resources to a greater extent than other plans might. Mrs. Buell said there is other funding out there, just waiting to see if the funding will come through.

Mrs. Buell wanted to discuss how we would move forward now and what happens a few weeks from now, and we find out teachers aren't able to return? There may be unanticipated expenses that we have now and no way of paying for, based on our budget we currently have. There is a potential for higher liability of funding that we don't have. Mr. Otto stated that is all correct. He said one of the benefits to municipalities in Connecticut that structured the education budget in a way that once the total budget is

approved, it can be moved around by the Board of Education. He said some of the questions become questions of priorities within the existing budget as opposed to a request of additional funds. It's a question of reallocating money already approved. Mrs. Buell stated that many of the districts are talking about uncommitted reserves. We don't have that. We do work collaboratively with the town. We do need to go through a town meeting.

Mrs. Lyons asked about the 4 days a week and Fridays off that was mentioned earlier, is that not part of the current proposal? Mrs. Buell stated in order to return to school, it's all students everyday 5 days a week right now. AABB is the hybrid model with 1 day of distance learning.

Mrs. Lyons also asked about three or four weeks from now we would get a commitment from staff, can we move that up at all so we know what our need is? Mrs Buell will send another survey, and then the next step will be connecting with HR.

Mr. Otto asked if Mrs. Buell has checked with the liability insurer, do we have liability coverage that will protect us from a challenge of a parent or a taxpayer due to how we are choosing to operate the schools next year? He'd hate to see a situation develop where someone asserted that the way we're operating in the school system contributed to the bad health of a student. Mrs. Buell stated it's been a conversation with superintendents across the state. The Commissioner and the Governor have all addressed this and as long as we follow the plan and do our due diligence, such as collaborating with the Department of Health and following the guidelines, we are within our coverage. She will reach out to the carrier.

Mrs. Lyons stated we have received some guidance from the CIAC, but is it up to each individual school district if they want to eliminate sports for a season or a year? Mrs. Buell stated the Board can choose to do that.

Mrs. Buell stated that any questions anyone may have, please email buell@brooklynschools.org. She will post questions and responses on the website. Mr. Atchinson stated he would take a screenshot of questions in the chat on Zoom.

3. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 7:36 p.m.
(Perkins-Banas/Atchinson)
No discussion, unanimous vote to approve

Respectfully Submitted,
Donna L. DiBenedetto
Donna L. DiBenedetto
Board Clerk