

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
Nathan Richards

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 their monthly meeting in the Brooklyn Middle School Auditorium and virtually on July 28, 2021 via Zoom. In attendance were Mrs. Lyons, Dr. Perkins-Banas, Mr. Phaiah, Mr. Richards, and Mr. Atchinson (arrived at 7:04). Mrs. Jolley was absent. Mrs. Buell, Superintendent, Mr. Otto, Board of Finance, and Mr. Ives, First Selectmen, were also present.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Brooklyn Board of Education will conduct a virtual meeting in accordance with Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7B.

To support public participation the documents will be posted on the
Town of Brooklyn Website as well as the Brooklyn Public
Schools Website.

You are encouraged to send questions or comments to buell@brooklynschools.org prior to the meeting.

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

Quorum established. Mrs. Lyons called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. Public Comment

Kayla Burgess, 230 Tripp Hollow Road, greeted the Board of Education and Superintendent, Buell. She wanted to provide comments on the Brooklyn Public Schools policy that requires unvaccinated students who travel outside of Connecticut overnight to quarantine for seven days with a negative covid test or ten days without a test. She stated that this travel restriction was not listed on the recent thirteen step plan provided by the State Department of Education and the Department of Health as of July 27, 2021, but she was told by Superintendent Buell that this plan would remain in place for the coming school year. Ms. Burgess opposes this policy, she feels that it is unfair since some of their children are too young to receive the vaccine. She believes this policy was not designed well. She stated that Connecticut is fully open. Parents can bring their child to an indoor full capacity concert and return to school the next day, but taking a camping trip overnight to a nearby state with lower positivity rates is prohibited. Ms. Burgess asked

“Where is the logic in this and how is this protecting our school community?” She stated the state of Connecticut dropped the travel restrictions months ago and the Board continues using this policy with no basis, only CDC guidance. She does support many of the safety measures including cohorting, distancing and the mask mandate as these reduce risk to covid-19. She will have her children vaccinated when vaccines are available to them. Ms. Burgess disagrees with the restriction to all travel to all states. She asks the Board to consider dissolving this policy or restrict travel to states with high positivity rates or low vaccination rates.

Isaiah Sastre, 321 Day Street, greeted the Board of Education and Superintendent Buell. He has a 4 year old daughter joining the Brooklyn School in a year and has expressed his concerns with Superintendent Buell. He knows they have the childrens’ well-being in their best interest, but the guidance the Board has enforced is misguided. Mr. Sastre works for a big pharma and sees the money that is being made on baseless fear. Everyone is relying on science and this virus has a 99.9% survival rate. He stated that the CDC website states that masks are ineffective from protecting against the influenza virus and coronavirus, which has smaller particles. Mr. Sastre stated that we were raised to believe that we live in the greatest country in the world, land of the free. Where you have the freedom to pursue life, liberty and happiness. He stated this is not that, it is the furthest thing from the Constitution. How is no one considering the psychological impact on children? They are being brought up to be in fear of air. Mr. Sastre stated that the future of these children is in our hands. He stated the CDC mandates and guidelines do not supersede constitutional law or federal and state law. He understands that the Board is being pulled in all directions, but people should have a choice.

Katrina Frink, 16 River Farm Drive, thanked the Board of Education and Superintendent Buell for allowing her to speak. She would like to bring attention to the mitigation efforts that are planned for the upcoming school year. She believes they will cause more damage than good. She understands that they have had contact with public health experts and following recommendations from the CDC. She read data of how many children that have died with covid, some were already sick and had other health conditions. There is zero risk to healthy children. She stated data on how many children die from car accidents a year and lower respiratory illnesses. She doesn't think it is fair for kids to be tested after traveling out of state and having to quarantine. What about the damage to social skills from masks? Children are still developing social skills and reading faces and this cannot happen if teachers and peers are wearing masks. She has a first grade child, who struggles with autism, and this has affected him. She stated that kids are not in danger. Parents should be able to decide what is best for their children. If the district is not comfortable removing the mask mandate, leave it up to parents. Parents know what is best for their children. The Governor is allowing each district to decide. She wants the Board to listen to the parents and taxpayers that contribute to the school.

No virtual comments at this time.

David St. John stated he is a parent of two boys in school. He believes that the mask mandate should end and doesn't believe it is healthy for the children. He knows it is up to

the Board to decide if masks can be mandated or not. Mr. St. John stated that he is against it and it is healthier for children to not wear masks.

Susan Wasstrom stated she is a lifelong resident of Brooklyn. She went to Brooklyn School as well as her daughter, and now her two grandchildren. It was a tough year. She supports the mask mandate; she doesn't want the kids bouncing in and out of school. Her grandchildren have gotten used to wearing masks. She stated that we have come a long way through covid and wants to make it to the finish line without infection from her grandchildren. The school taught her about science and critical thinking, and feels we should follow the science. The CDC is recommending that we wear masks because of the uptick in the delta variant. We are the lowest vaccinated county in the state of Connecticut. She does not want the children to get this virus, she wants everyone to follow the science. We should have a choice. She does not think having the choice in the Constitution means people can infect others. She thanked the Superintendent, the Board and all that made school possible last year. Not knowing if they're in school or not was difficult for her grandchildren. Ms. Wasstrom strongly urges the mandate to stay in place until we see what the delta variant does.

Cynthia Scalzi stated she is a painter and knows about respirators and such. She asked when will this stop? Everyone was told fifteen days to flatten the curve and eighteen months later we are still in the same situation. She stated life as we know it hasn't happened. Her granddaughter hates wearing masks. If we are to follow the science, breathing through a mask reduces oxygen and can cause headaches and other illnesses. Ms. Scalzi stated that children's immune systems can go under stress. She stated that there is not one scientific fact that shows masks prevent getting the virus.

Aila Walstrom-Evans stated she does not like masks but does not want her kids to get sick with covid. She stated that kids are resilient and she wants to keep our kids safe from sickness and harm. She understands everyone's frustration and she doesn't want them to wear masks either. She thinks once vaccines come closer for kids, they should wear masks a little bit longer. Ms. Walstro-Evans stated that teachers can have more outside learning so masks can be off more. She thanks the Board for all that they have done.

3. Approval of Minutes

a. June 23, 2021 BOE Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of June 23, 2021.
(Perkins-Banas/Richards)
No discussion, unanimous vote to approve

4. Correspondence and Communication

a. June 21, 2021 Correspondence from Diane Wimmer

Mrs. Buell stated she received a letter from a retired teacher, Diane Wimmer, who also helped with distance learning this past school year. Mrs. Buell stated that Mrs. Wimmer saw teachers getting tired by the end of the year. She is concerned for the next school year for all staff. Mrs. Wimmer stated that she returned from retirement to help with distance learning 3 hours a day and did not need to make as many changes as her colleagues in a classroom needed to make. She stated she saw the physical and mental impact it had on everyone due to covid-19. Mrs. Wimmer stated that she knows that the district is trying to address the social and emotional needs of the student, but she urges them to remember the staff as well.

Mrs. Buell stated that there are some initiatives that need to occur. Focus on instruction, improve instruction and balance supporting staff, students and families.

Mrs. Buell stated that she wanted to mention two resignations that are not on the agenda. Gina Leplante resigned her position as a teacher at the middle school and has accepted a position with another district. Daniel Baccaro resigned from his counselor position at the middle school and accepted a position closer to his home. The Board and Mrs. Buell wishes them well with their future endeavors.

5. Administrative Reports

a. Brooklyn Projection

Mrs. Buell stated that they are still finalizing the 2020-2021 school year. She stated that there are some line item transfers that need to occur.

b. Expenditure Report

Mrs. Buell stated that there are still some negative line items, which will be handled with the budget transfers. There is still \$340,000 encumbered and \$61,000 not encumbered. She is expecting to exceed the \$100,000 as discussed at an earlier Board of Education meeting, to be returned to the Town of Brooklyn.

c. Budget Transfers

Mrs. Buell discussed the budget transfer requests in the amount of \$583,744.

Motion to approve the transfer of funds as outlined on the Budget Transfer Request in the amount of \$583,744 to adjust for negative balances.
(Perkins-Banas/Phaiah)

No discussion, unanimous to vote

6. Board of Education Committee Reports

Nothing to report

7. Board Representatives to Other Committees

Dr. Perkins-Banas stated that Spooky Nights has been retired and will not be happening this year, but “FEARGrounds” will be taking its place.” FEARGrounds” will take place on Friday, October 15, 2021 and Saturday, October 16, 2021. Tickets are \$10 per person.

8. Old Business

a. Cafeteria Management Update

Mrs. Buell stated that at the last Board meeting, she discussed outsourcing the cafeteria to EASTCONN. There will be a savings from hiring a full-time manager. She stated that she is looking for a motion to finalize the agreement for a 5 year agreement. Eastconn is inviting all current employees to apply and to continue to work for EASTCONN.

Motion to finalize the agreement to outsource food service management to EASTCONN effective August 1, 2021.
(Perkins-Banas/Richards)

Mr. Atchinson asked how it affects the budget? Mrs. Buell stated that all the food services runs out of profit from the food service and it will not change the Board of Education budget.

No further discussion, unanimous vote to approve

9. New Business

a. 8th Grade Trip Options

Mrs. Buell stated that there is a field trip policy to have a field strip outside of school to enhance learning. The DC trip has not happened for the past 2 years due to covid. She stated she is unsure if this year will be different. The break of not going to DC gives administrators and 8th grade teachers to work together to review if the curriculum coincides with the trips they go on. She stated it is a large commitment to plan the DC trip and for families. Mrs. Buell will get back to the Board with what the learning objectives will be and will bring back more information.

b. Continuity of Services

Mrs. Buell stated she had to develop a plan for returning to school. The Continuity of Services Plan is the requirement for every district to develop a plan post-covid. She stated we were in school 55% of the time last year. The plan is on the school website. She wants to follow what the state is asking them to do, the State Department of Health and the district’s medical advisor. The travel advisory

may be an area to change. The masking on buses is required on the federal level and schools, the Governor is deciding that the districts can decide. She stated that the goal of the State Department of Education is to have all children return to school at 100% to in person learning. Guidelines are changing: students can be 3 feet apart with a mask; if there is a positive case outside the 3 feet, they are not a contact and does not need to quarantine; vaccinated students and staff do not need to quarantine. Mrs. Buell stated she meets weekly with DPH and the District's medical advisors. She will update with the recommendations as she receives them.

c. Discussion of Replacement Furnace/HVAC

Mrs. Buell stated that she received some quotes on replacing the furnaces. She stated that the Capital Improvement Committee has put this off, and it is something to be watching. Mrs. Buell has been advised to start the process of replacing the Brooklyn Public Schools boilers. The Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance are aware that something could happen to the boilers and that they will need to be replaced. Mrs. Buell stated that she drafted a letter to both the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance to consider if there is funding of a different source that would cover the cost. She stated the Town of Brooklyn was receiving ARP Funding and may not be applicable to use that money to replace the furnaces. Mrs. Buell would like to submit the letter and quotes for the Board of Education to consider submitting where it could take several months to replace.

Mrs. Buell stated she drafted a second letter for improving the HVAC systems, ARP Funding could be used for HVAC systems. The schools' ARP Funding is going towards staffing and the summer program, instruction materials, and technology. She stated that the Town of Brooklyn may be able to use ARP Funds to help support the HVAC improvements for covid-19 protocols and air exchange and air quality. Mrs. Buell stated that windows were open in the winter to increase air exchange and windows will continue to be open on buses and classrooms to force the air exchange.

Mrs. Lyons feels that we should let the Board Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance know that this is what the schools need and what we are thinking about doing and have it at the forefront in case funding does come available. She asked Mrs. Buell if the gas line comes up from Route 205? Mrs. Buell said it will be cost prohibitive to have the gas line come in, and needs to be put on hold. The gas line goes as far as Walmart not from 205.

The Board agrees it is a good idea to submit the letters to the Board Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance.

10. Public Comment

Kelly Coddington, 5 Meadowbrook, mask discussion is polarizing with the opposite end of the spectrum with that discussion. Not everyone will be happy. As a parent who made the choice to have their children get vaccinated, do vaccinated kids need to be masked? She is disappointed that it was brushed over on the agenda was the 8th grade trip and have been looking forward to going on the trip for five years and have been saving for it for the three of them to go. The kids have lost so much. She stated there will be plenty of parents that will step up and help plan it. Other districts are already planning it. She is all disappointed that the Administration is planning options and the Administration wasn't here to discuss these options.

Amy Landis, Fairway Drive, reiterates what Mrs. Coddington said about the 8th grade field trip. She stated she has not heard that the 8th grade history curriculum has changed. She is aware that Mrs. Hatzberger retired and did a great job planning this trip. She stated parents will help in the planning if staff won't step up. She stated that the 7th grade parents were called by the Board of Education this year as being a pain due to asking for education for their children. Now these 8th grade parents want their children to experience what they should have as 8th graders. They will take their kids on this trip through the school or alternatively. Mrs. Landis stated that there are other schools in the area that are planning this trip and Brooklyn needs to follow their lead. Their kids have been looking forward to this trip for the last four years.

Mr. Atchinson asked other Board members and Mrs. Buell, "We didn't say that the trip is not happening?" Mrs. Buell and Mrs. Lyons stated they have not said the trip is cancelled.

Jeff Otto, Board of Finance, reminded everyone that Mrs. Buell stated that the math test scores were disappointing last month. At the last Board meeting in public comments, he suggested making plans on increasing instruction. Is there any progress to report in math instruction to increase the math score results?

11. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 8:02 p.m.
(Perkins-Banas/Phaiah)

No discussion, unanimous vote to approve

Respectfully Submitted,

Donna L. DiBenedetto

Donna L. DiBenedetto
Board Clerk