

THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT

July 23, 2020 via Zoom

Approved Minutes

Shannon Darrah convened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

PRESENT:

School Board: Shannon Darrah, Charlie Buttrey, Donna Pluta, Megan Snider, Julie Acker

Principal: Chance Lindsley **OESU:** Emilie Knisley, Bruce Williams

Community: Approximately 40 community members were present on the Zoom conference.

Agenda Review:

Pluta to add a very quick update on the strategic plan.

Darrah to have the public comment and questions during the public comment section regarding returning to school, and then another public comment section after the board's discussion.

Review and Approve minutes of 7/15/20: they have not been released yet. Also, minutes were approved, yet they have not been released yet. **Motion** to rescind the approval of minutes from July 9, 2020 (Acker/Snider) (Unanimous)

Review of Orders:

Acker has seen some invoices from Odell.

Public Comment /Correspondence:

None at this time.

Discussion re: Plans for School Re-opening:

Lindsley

First, thank you to the team who has been working on this. Kate Dalpra's great leadership was wonderful. We did meet today.

Specific perspective: We are here because we love the kids. We want to teach them about: social and environmental justice, true democracy, confidence to speak up and share their ideas, and growth mindset.

1. We will follow state guidelines for safety: wearing masks, staying 6' apart, social distancing, cleaning spaces, making guidelines for entrance and dismissal, outdoors are encouraged, classroom spaces are mostly established. By August 1, we will send out the plan, with a handbook coming before school starts. We will have an isolation room if someone gets sick during the day.
2. The questions we continued asking today "What is best for the children?" It's complicated because if teachers don't have time to think and plan, then that's not the best for the kids. Parents need to work, we have all these different interests and situations. We are doing our best.
3. In-person learning will occur at school from 8:30-2:45 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday. Remote learning would happen on Wednesday when Thetford Academy is off. Lindsley is trying to reach Brennan at TA. Having Wednesday off would get us more versed in remote learning and ready for if we have to go back

to remote learning. This would give teachers some planning time, coordinate, talk about interventions, and communicate amongst staff, and deep cleaning. Some families want only remote learning. We are calling this concurrent remote learning. Supporting resources and families. Still figuring out how to exactly do that- out by August. It will look different than in the spring.

4. Our Spanish teacher cannot be with us this coming year due to licensing issues. Thinking of using that .6 position, adding .4 and hiring a full time teacher. Using our math coach as a classroom teacher, our fifth and sixth grade classes would go from 23, which will not fit 6 feet apart, to 16, which would fit. If we also hired a full-time teacher for the first and second grades, the classes would go from 19 down to 13.

Buttrey- clarifying math coach turning into a classroom teacher and hiring a full time teacher (adding .4 to the current budget). Concerns about Wednesdays causing hardship on parents, may place an enormous burden on parents. Could we use a place in the school for remote learning. If remote learning is on Wednesdays, would we still deliver lunches to students. **Lindsley-** Everything is possible. We could possibly do remote learning at school. Lunches were in the plan. **Knisley-** I hear and share the concern about Wednesday's piece and parents not having coverage for. Staff is thinking about the fact that they are being encouraged to keep students in pods. Cohorts of students should remain together, limiting the number of people they come into contact with. The students will stay together in their space, and the adults will move. What all the schools are up against is how to prep and use instructional time for teachers. Each school needs to determine what remote learning will look like. It will be different if there are only five children versus 30 students.

Lindsley- with TA being off on Wednesdays, it seems to make sense that we also use Wednesdays. Collaborations are going to be deliberately removed. **Knisley-** In the chat there's a link to what the schools are going to be expected to do. It is from the VT Department of Health. The planning centers around this guidance. All children and staff will have a temperature check and questions at their first point of contact- whether it be the bus or at school. What happens if... the information is all in the document.

Lindsley- meeting with the Montshire and Cedar Circle for other outdoor opportunities. Outdoor education is looking as a safer place than indoors.

Buttrey- Is TASP running, and are there limits for drop-off? **Lindsley-** There is a plan to have TASP, met with Allan today to look at spaces. The kids are limited to their pods all day, and then they are allowed to mix on the busses and at TASP. We are using a harm reduction model. Maybe using tents for grade levels to separate. The mornings will be different. There will be no morning recess- after having temperature checked and questions asked, children will go directly to their classrooms back door and enter there, again limiting contact with others. Children will be dropped off at 8:30.

Darrah- We will need to look at what the financial impact this will have on the budget.

Lindsley- Yes maybe at a future meeting we can discuss. The desks have been ordered at a cost of \$16,000. To separate the buses will cost an extra \$250 a day.

Buttrey- Will we get credit for not running the buses Wednesdays? **Knisley-** Good question, and we will have to look into it.

Knisley- Transportation, desks and infrastructure is a key piece of the financial picture. There is a federal grant to help with some of the COVID related costs. There is likely to be some impact on the 2021-22 year. **Lindsley-** Adding a full-time teacher for this year, eliminating Spanish for this year, and we still need to hire four to five paraeducators.

Public Questions:

Rachel Cook- Will there be a questionnaire coming out to parents about making a choice? If we put out the plan, and then meet with parents, and then send out a questionnaire, parents will likely know more about which way they want to go.

Gail Maxwell- If using the math specialist as a fifth/sixth teacher, does that mean there will be four classrooms? We would stay multi-age because of the numbers: 27 fifth graders and 40 sixth graders. For the first and second graders, they are more equally divided so we may separate and have two first and two second grade classes.

Kim Crow- So if students have to stay in their pod, what will multi-age classrooms look like? This is pushing us to more project based learning and proficiency. Math is always a challenge. **Laura Sharpless-** What will math look like? Fundamental root is shifting and designing learning experiences that meet each child. A focus on the learner. It will take a lot of work.

Megan O'Dell- It seems like your planning for a whole school, yet there may be a lot more families who go remote. It is true, but we have to plan for it. **O'Dell-** it is disconcerting not knowing the plan, so we are making our own plans. We would do remote learning vs. homeschooling. **Knisley-** just last week we were given governance of what would be counted as school day.

Vanessa Allen- Homeschooling is different from remote learning, is remote learning through TES an option? If remote learning is being offered through TES, then yes we would want remote learning. **Lindsley-** There are three phases of learning related to COVID. Phase 1, everybody is remote learning. Phase 2, either in school or remote learning. Phase 3, everybody is learning at school. The state has told us to plan on opening at Phase 2. **What about specials?** Special teachers will partner with a classroom for a few weeks, and push in. The gym is closed. Remote learning will be hard to capture specials.

Julie Acker- What is the deadline for filing to homeschool? The agency is being more flexible than in the past according to Secretary French. There has always been a rolling entrance, but again, being more flexible.

Chris- Wondering if people choose to homeschool and funds being taken away from the school. How to make a choice when we don't actually know what remote learning will look like. The head count the state uses is from information they obtained from last year. This is the equalized pupil spending information. So this year's data will impact next year.

Sarah Atherton- If families choose remote learning, are they able to switch mid-year? Yes, we don't have a definite, as far as whether it is by trimester or mid-year.

Bette Nunez- Are all the schools in the district going to offer a remote option to families. Yes, but it may look different in each school. All schools have it some way.

Laura Sharpless- So it looks like it will have a big impact on TES funding for the 2021-22 school year if a lot of families decide to homeschool 2020-21? Yes. It would depend on the ages, ranges, and types of students.

Megan O'Dell- how is school dealing with immune compromised staff or staff who have family at home? There is detailed information on this: Americans disabilities Act, Family medical leave, and now specifically for COVID there are new rules and regulations.

Sue Farrell- TA is asking parents to commit to two days per week or four days per week.

Kate Hill- While we are trying to figure out what remote learning is going to look like, it will not look like it did in the spring. Want to be sure that people understand that remote learning will not look like it did in the spring. Teachers can't do what they were doing in the spring as well as teaching in the classroom.

Tori Emery- Is this an all year plan or if COVID cases in Vermont decrease is there the possibility of school going back to full time? If there is a vaccine, or something like a big decrease in cases happens, not sure what it will take to get back to normal.

Benjamin Williams- Will Spanish still be addressed in some way so that it is not totally lost? Good question, but the timing of this pandemic makes more sense to have a full time teacher for safety, and then next year we go right back to having Spanish. We can't have visitors in the building so we can't bring someone in. Lindsley speaks Spanish so maybe he could go in and do a Spanish class.

Charlie Buttrey- To add to Lindsley's response to Tori's question. If someone comes and says that we are totally safe now, and the Department of Pediatrics says it is safe for everyone, then we will open up.

Megan O'Dell- Understanding that remote learning has just been discussed with teachers and staff, will the remote learner be part of the pod, or will it be more like the spring with the assignments and homework? Needs to know more about the remote learning structure to make decisions.

Laura Covella- Will parents be allowed in the building? No, that is state guidance in trying to keep everyone as safe as possible.

Marybeth Zack- What is the protocol if a student or staff tests positive for COVID? VT Department of Health guidelines. There are specifics. We would work with the Department of Health, who will do tracers. In school, that might mean anyone who has been in contact with the person may need to quarantine.

Benjamin Williams- Will a remote student be watching a live video of the classroom, and how would it work if they are outside. It can't really be answered right now as the specifics aren't defined. There has been talk about having academics in the morning and social-emotional time in the afternoons. It is going to be a lesser school experience if you are not in person.

Vanessa Allen- If you find that a greater chunk of students want distance (remote) learning, will more effort be put into distance learning? Catch-22. People aren't going to make a choice until they know what it is going to look like, after August first.

Meeting was hacked, and discontinued as is and a new meeting started.

Meeting recalled to order at 8:51 pm, and the public portion was done.

Motion made (Buttrey) to allow the superintendent to hire a full-time teacher for the 2020-21 school year. Seconded (Pluta).

Acker- In moving the math specialist to a classroom teacher, are we losing the math specialist in a year that we need it more than ever? It's a big concern. If that is the best use of staff, then that is what should be. A new teacher would be a one year position. (Unanimous).

Acker- How do we fill the gap of a math specialist when we are looking to teach to the learner and not the program? If Wednesday flies, then that could be used as professional development. Increasing teacher to student ratios will help with math, and help with the math coach returning next year.

Other Business

Pluta- Strategic plan- contacted everyone and got a lukewarm response. Kate, Sara and Chance are not able to join back in as they are tied up with what is happening in school now. Without them, as they provide 90% of the input, it seems to make sense to put it on hold until later in the fall.

Executive Session: Contract Negotiations

Motion: that the board would find a premature general public knowledge with what regarding our negotiations would place the board at a substantial disadvantage by disclosing its negotiation strategy. (Buttrey/Pluta) Unanimous.

Motion: to go into executive session to discuss professional and support staff negotiations. Inviting Melanie Elliot, Emilie Knisley, and Chance Lindsley to stay. (Buttrey/Acker) Unanimous.

Motion: to adjourn at 9:29 pm (Snider/Pluta). Unanimous.

Minutes Prepared By:
Ginni Balch, Minutes Clerk

Respectfully Submitted,
Julie Acker, Board Clerk

FUTURE MEETINGS: August 6, 2020