

VOLUNTOWN BOARD OF EDUCATION
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 SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS: Adam S. Burrows

BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

August 27, 2020
 Virtual Meeting - 7:00 p.m.

*This meeting was recorded and live-streamed at the following:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXdF6kZOMhDVNetgiDX2MAQ>*

- I. CALL TO ORDER** Chairperson Beauparlant called the Google Meet virtual meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.
- ATTENDANCE** **BOE Members Present:** Kate Beauparlant (Chairperson), Arikka Kalwara, Meagan Wicks and Cathy Grant (Secretary),
Absent: Kristen Trahan (Vice Chair), Christopher Wilson and Skart Paul
Also Present: Adam S. Burrows (Superintendent), Amy Suffoletto (Principal), Lloyd A. Johnson, Ph.D. (Director of Student Services)
- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** - The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- III. CITIZEN'S COMMENTS**
 Kate Beauparlant read the following letter received by Sarah Thompson:
Dear Voluntown Board of Education,

It was with great enthusiasm that I read the schools reopening plan for the fall. It is clear from that document that a lot of time and effort went into formulating the reopening plan. I want to thank the reopening committee and Amy Suffoletto for their work.

After reading the plan, the choices presented in the plan are very binary- full time in person or full time virtual. Given the multiple changes necessary to support learning- either for an in person format or virtual format- the plan does not address nor gives time for students, teachers and parents to scale up to, adapt and comply with these changes. The work required by all- student, teachers, staff and parents will be a lot. While I understand the drive to reopen schools quickly and support in person learning- the reality of reopening the school means that many things will be different. Teacher, staff, and student safety are paramount. Learning the new ways of doing this will require diligence, discipline, and constant re-education to ensure all are following the infection control and safety protocols being developed. After reading the plan, there appears to be very little flexibility or ramp up period provided to give everyone a chance to familiarize and internalize these new workflows. No business has reopened at 100%; we see in other business sectors a gradual reopening plan - perhaps we should consider the same. One recommendation may be to start all students in a virtual learning format and slowly bring classes back in waves for in person learning. This would ensure all students and teachers can successfully use the virtual format while allowing time for the staff to get their new workflows down for in person learning. There would be flexibility to scale up or scale back as needed depending on a variety of metrics including how students and staff are doing with the changes and COVID case rates.

The preparation and systems we put into place in these first few days and weeks will be the difference between a successful or mediocre academic year. I strongly urge the reopening committee to make virtual learning a part of learning from day one and to give time to staff and students to acclimate to the new in person learning format. Unfortunately, as we have seen by the recent experience from other states there are no do-overs. We have once chance to get this right. Closing schools within days of reopening is disruptive and perhaps can be mitigated through a phased in plan for in person learning that offers more control and flexibility for the administration.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my thoughts. I am grateful to the work of the reopening committee and their commitment to teacher, staff, and student safety.

*Respectfully,
 Sarah Thompson (8-13-20)*

Mr. Burrows noted appreciation for the concern about helping all students make a successful return to school. The Board of Education, at their 8-13-20 meeting, approved a school calendar change that designated the first week of school with Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday as early dismissal days and Wednesday as a remote learning day. This would allow faculty, staff, parents, and students to work together in reviewing procedures that maintain social distancing from arrival to dismissal and in-between. It would also allow opportunities to observe students as they work in a school organized to address and promote safety in a time of COVID-19. The goal is to help every student succeed.

IV. VOLUNTOWN REOPENING PLAN

1. Review of Updated Reopening Plan and Parent Survey Results

Adam Burrows, Superintendent, noted that the Reopening Committee has held meetings on July 2, 7, 14, 21, 28 and August 4, 11, 18, and 25. Follow-up meetings will continue on a weekly basis in September to review and update our Reopen Plan for the Voluntown Public Schools. Agendas and Minutes, along with many online resources and information about COVID-19, have been posted on the school website. There are also links to CSDE (Connecticut State Department of Education) information.

The first day of school for our K through 8th grade students will occur on Monday, August 31, 2020. This first week of school will include early dismissals on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesdays will be remote/distance learning days for students, teachers will review distance learning activities and more time is allowed to clean the school.

Transportation routes and arrival/dismissal procedures have been detailed and developed to allow for cohorts of students to maintain appropriate social distancing. Students will wear masks. There will be no before or after school activities for a period of time. UNCAS Health District and information from the state have been valuable resources in documenting the status of the COVID-19.

Amy Suffoletto, VES Principal, has surveyed the parents of K through 8th Grade students and, as of this date, we have had 47 students (17 in grades K-2 and 40 in grades 3-8) opting by parent's choice to remain out of school for remote learning. Technology upgrades have been made to support students at home. Amy answered the Board's questions regarding the number of students being bussed and she reviewed the procedures in detail. She expressed great thanks to Terry Chenette, Transportation Coordinator, for her exceptional organizational skills on coordinating and creating the bus schedules and runs. She also thanked the High School families for responding to the surveys which aided in the difficult task of scheduling the bus routes to all the designated high schools so that proper social distancing can be utilized. Superintendent Burrows noted how the Voluntown Public School System has the flexibility to organize all of this because we run our own busses and have our own drivers.

Our Pre-School Program, now in its 15th year, is almost fully funded by a \$198,000 state grant which requires a local School Readiness Council to run the program and follow strict guidelines of the OEC or Office of Early Childhood. We are required to have 44 students in this program to maintain the full \$198,000 grant. Monthly attendance is required and if the number falls below 44 students, the grant is reduced by \$450 per month or \$4,500 per year for each student who is not enrolled in the program. Therefore, the state will fund non-residents who attend this program located at VES. Transportation is not available for non-resident students.

Amy Suffoletto, VES Principal, has also surveyed the parents of Pre-School students and, as of this date, we have a projected total of 35 students. The COVID-19 restrictions required us to schedule registration just last week rather than in June. We are projecting to meet 44 students by the end of September to avoid a loss in revenue of \$450 for each student below 44. The survey determined there are students who will be in school and students who will remain at home for distance learning. Therefore, one teacher will work with the in-school students and the other Pre-School teacher will work with distance learning students.

The School Readiness Grant requires at least two-and-a-half-hour days for students. The arrival and dismissal times for Pre-School will be 9:30 a.m. until Noon each day. This allows us to have proper social distancing on the school busses for K through Eighth Graders. It also allows the student to arrive and dismiss at a time and place that is safely away from other students. The schedule will not allow the availability of transportation for Pre-Schoolers.

A COVID Prevalence assessment was recently published by OEC about Childcare in Connecticut:

- 47 Covid-19 cases were reported to OEC at childcare facilities from 3/24/20 - 7/28/20
- 78.7% of Covid-19 cases were among staff and 21.3% among children
- During this time, open childcares and permissible number of children served by childcares increased
- Suggests 90.8 to 138.5 cumulative incidence of Covid-19 cases per 100,000 in childcares
- Up to 10 times lower than Connecticut's cumulative incidence of 1387 per 100,000
- CT residents are 10 times more likely to get Covid-19 in the state in general than in a childcare

The Superintendent noted that Brian Kallio, Director of Maintenance and Facilities is meeting with the fire martial this week to inspect the school.

Lloyd A. Johnson, our Director of Student Services, has guided the process of planning for the implementation of each I.E.P. for Special Education students during this time of COVID-19. He has worked to coordinate meeting with parents to review any needed adjustments in schedules for students who will attend VES or one of our seven designated high schools, or in a out-placements. He noted there are five students who will participate in remote learning and there are three students who will receive remote Speech and Language Services.

Our school system has complied with all state guidelines, addendums, and directives from the State of Connecticut. We have also followed all Executive Orders by the Governor during this time of COVID-19. A special thank you is extended to the Board of Education in developing a budget that has allowed us to prepare for COVID-19. And a special thank you to the members of the Voluntown Reopen Committee.

Members on the Voluntown Reopen Committee include:

Adam S. Burrows -----	Superintendent of Schools, Chair and Point of Contact
Amy L. Suffoletto -----	Principal and LEA COVID-19 Health and Safety Liaison
Lloyd A. Johnson -----	Director of Student Services
Holly Santiago -----	School Nurse
Brian Kallio -----	Director of Maintenance and Facilities
Terry Chenette -----	Transportation Coordinator
Thomas O'Connor -----	Director of Food Services
Rachel Ricard -----	Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and Parent
Andrea Kelly -----	SRBI Teacher and VEA
Angela Gardella -----	Paraprofessional and CSEA
Kate Beuparlant -----	Board of Education Chair and Parent
Jim Ward -----	Technology Consultant
Kathy Groth -----	Counselor/Social Worker
Tracey Hanson -----	First Selectwoman and Parent
Patrick McCormack -----	UNCAS Health Director
Amanda Page -----	Parent
Toula Wyland -----	Preschool Teacher

2. Review of 2020-21 Calendar

There have been a few school systems that have delayed the opening of school for another week. Voluntown Public School Systems will proceed as scheduled and will reopen on Monday, August 31, 2020.

3. CTSDE COVID-19 Relief Funds

Adam S. Burrows, Superintendent of Schools, announced that our school system submitted requests to the State of Connecticut for COVID Relief Funds and was recently listed to receive \$238,719 and on 8-26-20 he received notification the amount was increased to \$260,474.

These funds will eventually be available directly to the Voluntown Public Schools for purchasing items in the categories of: PPE or Personal Protective Equipment, Transportation, and Cleaning, Health, and Safety. We are reviewing the air conditioning in four remaining classrooms for air quality. There are also upgrades available for our rooftop ventilators for air flow.

4. Other

Voluntown submitted an application to secure CARES ACT or ESSER funds made available in March, 2020. The release of the funds was delayed. We have received approval for a total of \$32,674 and the funds will pay for upgrading the Wi Fi in the JHS wing of the school, purchasing online learning programs, additional technology, and personal protective equipment.

An application requesting \$86,000 in expenditures was submitted to the Town of Voluntown to be forwarded to FEMA for possible reimbursement of “eligible” expenditures due to unanticipated COVID-19 expenses. FEMA will review the request and determine what might qualify for reimbursement. They will then determine the percentage and send it to the Town of Voluntown for the Town Undesignated Fund.

The State Department of Education recently circulated a survey to determine the technology needs of local school systems. The Superintendent submitted a request for 75 Chrome Books and ten Wi-Fi hotspots to increase our distance learning capacity. A recent communication identified Mid-October as the estimated delivery date. It also mentioned that a company hired by the state will be scheduling an appointment to identify the location areas in town needing a hotspot upgrade.

V. PERSONNEL

All positions from the opening of school have been filled. An internal transfer replaced a retiring Fourth Grade teacher position. A long-term substitute with State of Connecticut Teacher certification will fill a First Grade teacher position. A Paraprofessional on staff has been re-assigned to NFA to meet the requirements of an I.E.P. or Individual Learning Program. We are advertising for a Custodian, and also Bus Monitors to maintain social distancing on routes. It is our intention to pay for these positions through the Relief Grant funds.

VI. NEXT REGULAR MEETING – Thursday, September 10, 2020

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION – None

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Beuparlant expressed her thanks to Amy, Adam, Lloyd and the Staff for their tireless and paramount work to reopen VES. Board Members Cathy Grant and Arikka Kalwara agreed and said they’ve all done a wonderful job in getting us all together. Superintendent Burrows stated that VES has a wonderful staff and praised the Board’s decisions to successfully reopen and noted that we hope to continue that success as we look to the future. Principal Suffoletto again thanked the Staff and expressed she feels ready for the students to return safely and have good school experiences once again.

MOTION (8/27/20) was made (Grant/Kalwara) to adjourn at 8:09 p.m.; all in favor. Motion carries.

Witness

Date

Attest

Date

Respectfully drafted and edited by:

Adam S. Burrows, Superintendent of Schools

Dee Dee Jackman, Board of Education Clerk

APPROVED AT THE 9/10/20 BOE MEETING