

MINUTES OF REGULAR COMMITTEE MEETING
January 21, 2021 @ 6:00
Video Conference Meeting accessible via SCTV15

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<p>Chairperson Kyle Belanger called the virtual meeting of the South Hadley School Committee to order at 6:00pm, which is streaming live.</p> <p>Present: Kyle Belanger, Chairperson; Allison Schlachter, Vice Chairperson. Charles Miles; Christine Phillips; Allyson Garcia; Maddy Foley, Student Representative</p> <p>Also, present: Diana Bonneville, Ph.D., Interim Superintendent</p> <p>Some of the School Committee, Jen Voyik and Dr. Bonneville had just been in the JLMC meeting and were talking about COVID #s. Charles Miles spoke about the numbers from the past weeks and shared his screen so that everyone could see. He said the numbers are increasing :</p> <p>57 New cases @ 5.4% on December 29th 58 New cases @ 6.74% on January 5th 59 New cases @ 5.58% on January 12th 64 New cases @ 4.28% on January 19th which includes the Mount Holyoke students testing which brings down the percentage. If MHC numbers are extrapolated, South Hadley positivity rate increases significantly. Charles says, “these are high risk numbers”. Sports are very high risk with no masks, no distancing and the students being competitive. Increased numbers at Baystate are going up and now we have new COVID Variants to deal with. Towns usually have 2-day tracing, but it is taking about 6 days for tracing to be completed. Dr. D’Alessandro and Sharon Hart have said with South Hadley at 5.58% everyone should stay home, wear a mask, social distance and wash their hands. Dr. D’Alessandro added that “we have not peaked yet and now with the new variants we should follow that advice and see if we could bring the numbers down so students can return to school, which would help their social emotional needs.”</p> <p>The only schools that can still compete that are not in the red are Ware, Hampden Charter and Ludlow. Hockey has its own guidelines and if someone on the team was positive for COVID, the whole season would shut down to quarantine. Hockey already has 5 games cancelled because we need 2 weeks to practice before we can compete in a game and we have already lost games for starting late.</p> <p>Charles Miles mentioned that 1/3rd of South Hadley’s cases were in the last 30 days and he believes we should be talking about cancelling sports. Allison Schlachter believes our priorities have to be to get the numbers down to open our schools. Christine Phillips says “our numbers are going down, but Charles Miles disagreed with her and said “that is because Mount Holyoke students are back and the negative tests from these students is driving the percentage down. Allyson Garcia asked if we could let the person in the waiting room with their hand up into the meeting to speak? Chairman Belanger asked the School Committee to amend the agenda to open Public Comment @ 6:45.</p> <p>Mrs. Pete spoke with regards to winter sports, “I don’t disagree kids need to go back to school, but in hockey all kids are not sharing equipment, are masked, they have a helmet and gloves on their hands. I feel for the people that have been sick, but there are 11 cities playing and my son is a senior and I want him to play even if I have to sign a consent form. We will have to find somewhere else for him to play. Please think about this. These boys could come across germs from anywhere in this pandemic.</p>	<p>Call to Order</p> <p>Attendance</p> <p>Winter Sports Re-entry Discussion and vote</p> <p>Public Comment</p>
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Mr. Godek spoke about being sick for the last week because someone from his wife's job came to work with what she thought was a cold. "I believe it is more important to get the kids back into school!" Kids will not tell you if they feel sick, they just want to play hockey, we need to mask up and stay safe. Cases are continuing to rise, and we need to stop this now, I would love to see the kids playing, but this is not the time."

Jason, a parent of a Granby student that co-ops with South Hadley spoke. " We are in a pandemic, but this is not going away. I do not take this lightly; we need to be informed and careful. I disagree with Mr. Godek, I am asking what's best for the individual to make his own decision. Respectfully I make the decision for normalcy."

Allison Schlachter " would like to hear from Diana or Sharon what the transmission rate has been during practices and games"? Eric "says that 3 teams had to shut down and then it fell apart at the end of the season. Allison Schlachter asked who handles positive cases with our students and what is the plan for information? Liz replied " that parents usually call the school nurse and the nurse calls the principal of that school , who in turn calls Dr. Bonneville and then we wait for the Board of Health to do contact tracing. If we become aware of a case, we shut things down until contact tracing is completed. Liz also mentioned that since January 4th there have been 16 student athletes at the high school that have tested positive. Due to HIPPA laws the club teams do not have to report to schools, they can wait until the Board of Health lets the district know from whatever town they were playing in."

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics says there are inherent risks with sports, and the sports discussion should not happen until students are back in school. Allyson Garcia "feels that keeping kids from sports would mean the #s would go down and we could get the students back in school". Charles Miles says "that we should shut down and stay home and the #s would decline rapidly." He also mentioned seeing all the restaurants in town packed with customers, and hearing that students are getting together in groups with no masks, opening schools might be a better way to have the students together safely, in which case could allow sports with supervision. Christine Phillips added "that her son has been playing club hockey with masks, supervision and temperature taken when students arrive. Their mental health is better when they are playing, and I think we can do this safely. " She is disappointed about how many games that we have missed already, and do we want to risk it for so few games left?"

Chairman Belanger said " he was in favor of skills & drills coming into the meeting tonight, because it's contained, and students are together. We are trying to make it time together for the students when lots of us have nobody. Does the School Committee

Feel its yah or nay for skills and drills? Students would have to come prepared to play without using the locker rooms for basketball. Other sports would have to see about keeping their contracts and handling their costs for renting the spaces. The kids need to see each other or are they getting together anyway with our #s going up in South Hadley?" He also says that every physician and nurse they have spoken to says its not a good idea. Allison Schlachter says "sports are the be all end all and the kids that are not athletes do not have any of the opportunities. Allyson Garcia says, " she finds it frustrating to not have the experts there to answer the questions that can't be answered

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from their written responses to forgo sports.” Christine Phillips feels we can have winter sports by being monitored and students held to a standard of safety. Charles Miles would like to talk about the difference between the Fall & Winter sports, but the #s are much higher, and the variant strains spread very quickly between children. Chairman Belanger would like to know if our tolerance of risk has gotten higher as the risk gets higher. Allison Schlachter added that she thinks the population is taking more risks as we have gotten used to living in a pandemic.

Eileen Garvey says, “the cases are growing, and the staff is beginning to get ill. The new variance is more infectious than what we have seen. Some students think they have a cold or allergies and come to the game with symptoms. We know that mental health is so important, but how do we proceed with this with the #s growing? We have to listen to the doctors.”

Dr. D’Alessandro said, “ I have lived in this community for 28 years and there is a risk with sports that is not evident with in-person learning while students are in school.” Allison Garcia asked Dr. D’Alessandro what is the connection with sports and opening school? Priority as a School Committee is that learning is #1, and in classroom transmission is maintained by teachers in the classroom. The rates are going up and a new variant will complicate things and thinking about playing sports should be many months down the road. As people get tired from the isolation is there any pros to playing sports, so the students can get together? Having students get together is too much of a risk and competitive efforts will bring more #s. Chairman Belanger said,” Dr. D’Alessandro I applaud your efforts and your hard decisions. It would be helpful if you were available on Monday night in case there are questions about the re-entry to school if needed.” Maddie Foley added that she as a senior this year, that she and her friends would rather go to school and enjoy their year and forgo sports.

Vote

Charles Miles made a motion to cancel winter sports session for this year; seconded by Allison Schlachter; Yes vote to cancel and no vote to go ahead with sports: roll call vote; Schlachter aye, Phillips no, Garcia no, Miles aye, Belanger no: motion does not pass.

Swimming will have virtual meets. No other teams will be in the facility, no locker room use, and the students will arrive ready to swim. Full battery of swim practice & meets competing against ourselves with referees, everyone masked until ready to swim. Practices are 2hr. blocks with staggered lanes, 6 meets, 18 swimmers but this will probably grow. Students will need to stay socially distanced around the pool.

Vote

Chairman Belanger would entertain a motion to allow winter swim to begin on Monday, January 25th. So, moved by Allison Garcia; seconded by Christine Phillips: roll call vote passes 4/1 with Charles Miles voting no.

Hockey team will be uniformed with helmets, their own sticks, and gloves. Allison Schlachter is concerned about how positive tests, and how long we will wait for tracing from Holyoke Board of Health? Chairman Belanger feels positive about hockey, while we do not have students in the buildings, that would be the lone place to be social and play. Any positive cases on the team shuts down the whole team. MIAA & PVIA has set standards for hockey play, but the culture around hockey has been pressure to play. Charles Miles remarked that this not just affects the individual

Vote

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& hockey can be problematic. Hockey research has found that the optimal ice temperature and humidity in the ice rink is like a perfect storm for COVID.

Chairman Belanger would entertain a motion to begin the Winter Hockey season on January 25, 2021; so moved by Christine Phillips; seconded by Charles Miles; roll call vote: Belanger- aye, Schlachter- no, Phillips-aye, Miles -no, Garcia-no, motion fails 3/2.

Basketball's precautions include no guarding for more than 3 seconds, minimize closeness. This is the sport with the most cleaning involved, and basketball has not been the safest game. Skills & Drills would be good here and they must wear a mask and have a few modifications. Maybe medical grade masks for smaller particles from the variant would be advisable. Christine Phillips suggested Skills & Drills if there is no basketball season.

Chairman Belanger would entertain a motion to allow Basketball on Monday, January 25, 2021; so, moved by Christine Phillips; seconded by Allyson Garcia; roll call vote: motion does not pass 3/2. Miles no & Schlachter no.

After much discussion around basketball from the School Committee there was a motion made by Chairman Belanger to allow basketball to play Skills & Drill's; so moved by Schlachter; seconded by Allison Garcia; roll call vote; roll call vote Schlachter Aye, Phillips aye, Miles no; Garcia aye; Belanger aye: motion carries an aye: motion passes 4/1.

Custodial staff to clean, players set to play on the way in, tryouts for 9-12 and practices M-F.

Next meeting January 25, 2021 @6:00 PM

Chairman Belanger would entertain a motion to adjourn; so, moved by Allyson Garcia; seconded by Charles Miles: motion carries unanimously.

Adjourned @ 8:40

True copy:

Diana Bonneville, Ph.D.
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Date approved: _____

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Vote

Vote

Next Meeting

Adjourn

Adjourned

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