

State Board of Education & Early Development
Approved Minutes
August 19, 2020
Department of Education & Early Development
801 West 10th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Wednesday, August 19, 2020

Chairman Fields called the meeting to order on August 19, 2020 at 3:03pm. Roll call was taken and a quorum established. Members present included: Member Griffin, First Vice Chair Hamilton, Member Kowalski, Member Stockhausen, Second Vice Chair Van Diest, Lt. Colonel Hammill, Student Advisor Scott and Chair Fields. After the pledge of allegiance, Member Griffin motioned to adopt the agenda for August 19, 2020 the motion was seconded by Second Vice Chair Van Diest. The agenda was adopted. There were no potential conflicts of interest identified.

Work Session

Agenda Item 1. Commissioner's Report.

a. Alaska Smart Start 2020 Update

Commissioner Johnson thanked the board for being present to receive an update. He thanked Second Vice Chair Van Diest for sharing that school has begun. They are excited to be welcoming back students both in buildings and those participating in distance learning. Commissioner Johnson shared with the board how proud he is of the diligent work and long hours that staff and educators have been putting in to solve complex problems. They are facing this challenge with renewed optimism.

He explained that so far 35 districts have submitted their Smart Start Plans to the department. These have all been reviewed by the department and the staff at Health & Social Services. Deputy Commissioner Melin has been conducting targeted outreach to each district that has yet to submit a plan to offer assistance. The department continues to host webinars daily in collaboration with Comprehensive Center through SERRC. These webinars cover everything from how to manage transportation safely to crisis response.

36 districts are utilizing the Alaska Statewide Virtual System. We also have 12 districts that are using Canvas. The department continues to offer as many options to districts and parents as they can so that every kid can get an excellent education. Commissioner Johnson stressed that COVID should not deter us from the mission of getting every child an excellent education.

b. A Presentation on Mt. Edgecumbe High School's Smart Start 2020 Plan

Commissioner Johnson thanked Superintendent Vanasse for the hard work that they have put into preparing for students to arrive at Mt. Edgecumbe this year.

Superintendent Vanasse thanked Commissioner Johnson and the board for their support. She also thanked her staff for their diligent work during these challenging times. She explained that one of the challenges to opening Mt. Edgecumbe this year is travel as nearly every community has experienced reduced flights and each flight has reduced capacity. They have dispatched staff to hub communities in order to help kids through the airports and get them on their way without interacting with the larger community.

She explained that early on they identified three non-negotiables that they strive to provide students: relationships, learning and safety. Superintendent Vanasse described three options for students this year. First, students who wanted to opt for a full online option could transfer to their community who could offer that. If they chose to defer they would not be required to reapply to Mt. Edgecumbe next year. Secondly, Mt. Edgecumbe is now offering a delayed start for those students who wish to wait and see how things roll out. Students who select this option will be able to access remote classes that do not necessarily depend on internet. Finally, students can select to attend full-time in-person with increased sanitation and daily mitigation practices.

Superintendent Vanasse provided data on this year's enrollment numbers. 43 students have selected a delayed start – they will arrive at Mt. Edgecumbe in November and participate in remote learning until then. 26 students have deferred and will enroll in their home community school. 322 students will be staying in the dorms (this is typically 412). 27 students will attend from town. In August, the total number of students on campus will be 349. Overall the total students enrolled, including those who selected delayed start, is 392.

Superintendent Vanasse detailed the testing plan for the Mt. Edgecumbe student population. A pre-travel COVID test is required of all students. Another test will be administered when they land in Sitka, students will remain quarantined in their dorm rooms until these test results are returned. Once again, students will be tested at seven days – they will remain in their “crew” (a cohort of about sixteen students) until these results are returned. Finally, another test will be administered at fourteen days – the campus functions will remain in mid/high risk until these results are returned. Testing will continue weekly with one quarter of the student body and staff.

Superintendent Vanasse described the health monitoring measures that are being taken. Students will receive health screening questions each day. Temperature kiosks for daily checks will be available and a Health Hotline managed by the SEARHC Health Clinic has been created to answer questions. The COVID screening will be separate from the regular health clinic and their services. Rapid COVID tests will be available for any suspicion of the illness. Superintendent Vanasse then went on to describe the increased sanitation and mitigation practices. They will be following CDC guidelines. A fogging-style disinfectant will be used

twice a day in common living areas and once daily in dorm rooms and academic spaces. A routine wipe down of surfaces will take place between each class. One way traffic patterns have been created and masks will be required in indoor common spaces and classrooms. The visitation center on the outskirts of the campus will limit interaction of visitors on campus.

She explained that there have been flex modules put in place that depend on the risk levels. Both the community risk and the internal campus risk levels will be used. When “low risk” is perceived some town activities will be allowed with mask wearing. During “mid-risk” students will be confined to campus and visitors will be restricted. If “high-risk” is established then student interaction will be limited to “crews” and instruction by remote delivery will take place where students remain in dorm room for class. A containment plan and contact tracing has been established. “Warm” and “Hot” zones have been designated. The “Warm Zone” is for students who are waiting for test results or for those who are required to quarantine based on exposure suspicion. The “Hot Zone” is for “index” students – one who has tested positive. Superintendent Vanasse described how they plan to go touchless with the dorm software, REACH, for location check-in to campus locations. The data from this software may be pulled to show who was in the same locations if necessary for contact tracing.

Mt. Edgecumbe will continue a focus on providing quality education. Over the last three years they have been working on a 1:1 device program and google classroom training. This will ensure that students and teachers are prepared to access instruction from dorm rooms if needed. All core curriculum has been augmented with digital friendly resources and teachers are being instructed on how to utilize these tools. Teacher training time has been enhanced and an extended time for core classes has been set in order to allow for potential slowdowns.

c. Board Comments

Member Kowalski remarked that students from her home community are excited to return to Mt. Edgecumbe in order to receive a great education. She thanked Superintendent Vanasse for her work to re-open and for the excellent communication with students and parents to make them feel safe.

Member Hamilton asked if there have been plans set in place for getting students back to their communities when school ends? Superintendent Vanasse replied that plans have not been set in motion yet as they are taking this one step at a time. She remarked that the Galena School District has selected to go with all charters and it seems to be working out very well for them.

Second Vice Chair Van Diest thanked Superintendent Vanasse for the excellent plan put forward. She noted her appreciation for the great attention to detail.

Chairman Fields echoed thanks and admiration for the thorough plan. He also thanked Superintendent Vanasse for her willingness to go to the Bethel hub in order to support students as they travel to Mt. Edgecumbe.

Member Griffin encouraged Superintendent Vanasse to further investigate the option of non-stop charters from the larger hub-communities straight to Sitka without exposing the kids to stop overs in Anchorage and other places. She responded that they did explore the option but needed more information but that they do plan to look into this again in the future.

Superintendent Vanasse thanked the board for their support and dedication to Mt. Edgecumbe throughout the year.

Chairman Fields thanked Member Stockhausen for stepping up to fill a seat on the advisory board.

Deputy Commissioner Melin echoed thanks to Superintendent Vanasse and her staff for leading the planning and the great attention to detail that they have put into the plan. She stated that she is looking forward to hearing about the successes and lessons learned from this well laid plan at the board meeting in September. She also thanked the board for their support of Mt. Edgecumbe.

Commissioner Johnson thanked the board for allowing this time for the walkthrough of Mt. Edgecumbe's plan. He also expressed his gratitude for all those working throughout the state to lay plans and get kids back to school. He stated that although there will be challenges along the way he is confident that these will be solved to deliver excellent education. Commissioner Johnson also thanked NEA-Alaska for meeting with teachers across the state and helping with Canvas and for their work to create the Alaska Commons. He thanked Director Van Wyhe and her staff for the long hours they have put in to get the Alaska Virtual system up and running. ACSA continues to host many informative webinars with administrators in the state. Commissioner Johnson remarked that through these challenging times the true community aspect of Alaska is shining through as we get kids back in school.

Chairman Fields thanked the staff for their work in supporting districts as school opens.

Commissioner Johnson notified the board that the September meeting will be held on the Zoom platform. Several districts will be in attendance to share with the board their plans. He also thanked the staff at Health & Social Services as the two departments have been working closely to support school districts in the creation of these plans. He mentioned that Dr. Ohlsen has been assigned to support districts.

Chairman Fields adjourned the meeting without objection at 3:44pm.