

Jefferson School District
Official Minutes of the Special Meeting
Of the Board of Trustees
February 17, 2021

(Due to COVID-19, this meeting was held virtually through a Zoom webinar)

Present virtually: Debbie Wingo, President; Phil Raya, Vice President; Dan Wells, Clerk; Brian Jackman, Member; Pete Carlson, Member; Jim Bridges, Superintendent

In attendance virtually: Dena Whittington, Chief Business Officer; Nancie Castro, Director of Human Resources and Curriculum; Angelica Thomas, Director of Special Education; Sarah Steen, Curriculum Coordinator; Ken Silman, Emily Stroup, Principals; Celli Coeville, Administrative Assistant

I. OPEN SESSION

a. Call to Order at 6:30 PM

b. Roll Call to Establish Quorum – all Board members were present

c. Approval of Agenda-

MSA (Carlson/Jackman) – Approve the agenda as presented-

Ayes – 5

Nays – 0

Absent – 0

Abstain – 0

Carlson, Jackman,
Raya, Wingo, Wells

d. Public Comment for Items on the Agenda: Dr. Bridges read the public comments received via Google Forms:

Anonymous/ Parent & Teacher:

I was speechless last Friday night after reading the email notifying Jefferson School District Families that the voted and approved re-opening date would not happen. The amount of work that went into planning and preparing for our students to finally return safely to their campuses for in-person learning was so quickly thrown out the window. Teachers put in hundreds of hours preparing for this day, stressed parents had made plans, re-arranged their work lives and careers in order to allow their child to return, and our poor students by far received the biggest blow through that careless decision. These precious children who have been told for 11 months to keep doing their best, work hard, ignore your frustrations, and who had finally been given the promise they've been hoping for of returning to their school was snatched from them like a bully taking away their cherished stuffed animal. This is wrong! Your board exists to represent the best interests of our Jefferson community, you need to stand behind your decision and not be bullied by the teacher's union. I'm pleading to you now as a mother and a teacher, do the right thing. Open our schools and allow our children to return to their school for in-person instruction. The CDC and California health officials have stated over and over children need to be in school, please do not wait another day. Some of our children are on the edge about to fall into an extremely dark place, if you do not act soon, we may never be able to pull them back out.

Jennifer Moore/Mother of 3rd and 5th Grader:

To Dr. Bridges and the entire JSD Board:

We are now coming up on 1 year of having our kids out of school and off of the school campus. Our children haven't seen the campus, the principal, their teachers, their classmates for an entire year! Do you understand what this has done to our children? My 3rd grader has now given up after last week's promise to open. It's me keeping him going, nobody else. He doesn't trust the school any longer. This is due to the back and forth decisions. "Come back to school, no don't. Come back to school, no not yet. See you Tuesday. Never mind, no plan to see you." This is also due to the lack of help he gets and the lack of education he gets. Two hours behind a screen online is not enough and will never be enough, the teachers know that and he knows that. My 3rd

grader is done. Once again, JSD has made me the bad guy and my son has lost the will to continue to push forward for the sake of his own education. That is where we are at. Open the Schools! Fight the Union! Please keep our children at the forefront of your decision making process and do everything in your power to provide an in-person education. They are the future. This has to be fixed.

Anonymous/A teacher who cares:

I am disappointed how the district handled last Friday. It was not the teachers' (aka union) fault that the district chose not to follow guidelines. The union informed the district much earlier, but was ignored. Why is the district working against teachers? We have the same goal: getting students back to class, but safe and in compliance with all guidelines.

Heather Maloy:

Please open Jefferson School District. Our children need to be back in school. My children were devastated when they found out they weren't returning Tuesday.

Lea Austin/Parent:

I stand with our teachers. Please remember that teachers are part of our community too - they are not abstract beings; they don't exist for the sole purpose of being in service to us or our children. They are mothers, fathers, spouses, and caregivers too. They have their own health worries, some with underlying conditions that make them more susceptible to getting sick or dying from COVID, some live with others who are at high risk. From every teacher I know, they are desperately missing their students and the daily life of the school community. They are working harder than ever in these conditions - distance learning is not a break or a walk in the park. As a community, I implore us all to assume good intentions from one another, including our teachers. And before making decisions that demand teachers' place themselves in harm's way, carefully consider the science.

The CDC, it's director and leading experts have issued guidance & statements that schools should be the last to close and first to reopen and that in order to do, in-person instruction should be prioritized over broader community reopenings, extracurricular activities and the like in order to minimize transmission risk. All we have to do is look around town, or scroll through social media to see this guidance not being followed - schools have not been prioritized. Restaurants are open, people are gathering and socializing, rarely have I seen masks at playgrounds where school-age children and their families gather.

The CDC further recommends that part of mitigation measures allow teachers with higher risks to have other options to remain employed and work remotely. This district has yet to explain what those measures look like here. At a minimum, the district should assure that school staff have access to vaccines, options to remain remote for high risk staff, and that community transmission is lower before broadly reopening.

Frank Austin/Hawkins Parent:

I stand with our teachers. The rush to reopen on paper in November setup reopening before all - not just some - of the safety mitigation measures are in place. As a community, we are demanding teachers show up for reopening, but we have not ensured to the best of our ability, their safety. Look at downtown on a Saturday afternoon, parks on sunny Sunday, or social media feeds. The CDC recommendations to stop or limit other interactions in order to prioritize school openings are not being heeded widely enough in our local community, and many are intentionally disregarding them.

I understand that other businesses need to operate and that plenty of others have to work in-person during this pandemic - I am one them - and this is placing pressure on schools to reopen. But the conditions of other workers are not justification for placing teachers in unsafe conditions, especially when distance learning is an option. At the very least, in addition to the other measures already put into place for ventilation and PPE, we should be out of the purple tier, all school staff

should have access to the vaccine, and high risk staff should have options for other work arrangements. While maintaining distance learning for most students is in no way ideal, it does provide an alternative for now. I am glad for the teachers that they have a union that stands up on their behalf to protect their well-being. If more workers had this, we'd likely be in a very different situation with more protections for workers across occupations in the middle of this health crisis.

Ashleigh Dec:

Kids need to be in school!

Kristen Gama/Tom Hawkins Parent:

I know for certain that the staff at our school works incredibly hard for these kids. This difficult school year has shown that this school can rise above adversity. I am so thankful for this community.

However, I have seen a disturbing decline in the mental health of my children and others in our community. Zoom is not a suitable substitute for in person learning, even if it means something different from what we are all accustomed to. Any amount of social interaction for learning will bring improvement. I have already seen this improvement since one of my children returned to campus. I realize it is difficult for some of our best teachers, due to health issues, to return to in person teaching. The majority of parents who are desperate for a reopening of our schools are not angry with the teachers who are hesitant to be back. I think we all understand where you are all coming from, as many of us had to go back to work already into very crowded places where we are at risk every day so that we can feed our families. Grocery store workers, healthcare workers, law enforcement, mechanics, teachers who teach at private schools, and I can keep going.

USA today reported this morning that scientist believe COVID is here to stay. We must move forward in opening our schools. I am begging everyone who is fighting against the reopening to please see that it is our children who are at stake here.

Wren Pinette:

Our kids need to be back in school, this is devastating to them and their future. We are going to have an entire generation of kids with problems. Please!

Anonymous Teacher:

After a very long weekend of seeing our profession, work ethic, right to paychecks, and desire to return to school questioned, and at times ignorantly attacked on social media, I'm writing in for the first time to express my disbelief regarding how information went out last Friday. The district knew for many weeks the JTA had concerns about the district not meeting the new January 14 county guidelines and had been asked to provide documentation for the district's position. But of course parents and the community did not know this. Nor was it communicated to the public that it was the district's decision, not JTA to postpone the opening. With the timing and wording of the letter, it put all the blame and responsibility on the teachers and JTA, opening us up to an extreme backlash. My team left school on Friday apprehensive but eager to welcome students back. We'd worked for weeks getting to that point. We looked into our screens and told them how excited we were to have them back, scheduled special Zoom meetings with parents so they were fully prepared and informed, and spent many extra hours working to plan and organize for yet another new format of teaching. As a veteran of this district, I have given my heart and soul to my kids and their families. To be thrown under the bus by a very misleading and inaccurate letter in which the district took no responsibility for its decisions was truly disheartening to say the least. I can't wait to have kids back in my room and I hope in the future, parents will reach out looking for better understanding and facts before bashing those most respected teachers on social media.

A Concerned Parent and Teacher:

I have two questions that I would like addressed. First question, why did the communication about opening the schools and then closing the schools come so late? I remember Dr. Bridges stating that the staff and district families would have two-week's notice. On the survey, it was clearly stated that school might open on 2/16 and 3/1, but the families would get time to prepare. We received notification from the principals two days before opening on 2/16. Then we received zero days before a three-day weekend that the schools were closed again. Second question, why did Dr. Bridges and the Board wait until Friday, 2/12 to give the Union documentation that the JSD was open? It is sad that Dr. Bridges waited so long and then blamed it on the teachers and the Union. I am not sure if the District will ever be able to remove this black mark. Now teachers are the bad guys. This is not what the teachers wanted. They want to go back to school when the county states we can go back!

Jaxson Gama/ Tom Hawkins 4th Grade Student:

Zoom is not a good idea for kids to learn. We are at home and it looks like we're doing a good job on the camera but really we could easily get distracted with drawing, YouTube, or our brothers and sisters who may be at home with us. Then we end up with missing assignments and get discouraged with ourselves. Many of us have parents who work from home and they cannot always remind us to stay focused. I hope to be able to go in person back to school very soon.

Jeniene Cruz/President of Jefferson Teacher's Association:

No one wants to go back in classrooms with students more than educators, who know there is no equal substitute for regular in-person learning. For that to happen, there must be multi-layered safety measures in place, which includes following California Department of Public Health guidelines. At the time of the cease and desist letter, these guidelines were not met, and the pandemic remains out of control in the County. After multiple attempts to bargain in good faith, it is so disheartening that our superintendent and the school board members would rather put the safety of students, educators, and entire community at risk. At this time, we should be leading by example and collaborating together in the best interest of our students. That has been Jefferson Teachers Association's goal from the beginning of this pandemic, and it continues to be so.

Adeana Maloy

Children belong back in school! Give teachers the vaccine. Everyone is suffering from lack of socialization and education face to face.

e. Closed Session Adjourn to Closed Session for the purpose of discussing matters expressly authorized by Government Codes 3549.1, 54956.7, 54956.8, 54956.9, 54956.95, 54957, 54957.8, Education Codes 49079(c), 48912, 48918

f. ADJOURN TO CLOSED SESSION

II. RETURN TO OPEN SESSION – 8:03 PM
Welcome from Board President Mr. Wells

In Closed Session – The Board of Trustees discussed with legal counsel potential litigation.

III. EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
3.1 Board Action on School Reopening

Dr. Bridges read the following statement:

The Jefferson School District Board and I remain committed to bringing students and staff back to school safely. A few districts in San Joaquin County brought students back to in-person instruction in November. Even during the surge in December and January these districts were able to maintain the safe in-person operation of their schools. Jefferson School District (JSD) took a more

conservative approach, looking for lessons learned and using the time to put more safety measures into place for students and staff.

While many of the districts open to in-person instruction have chosen full-day schedules, JSD selected a partial day schedule to avoid having students on campus during unstructured activities such as lunch and recess where the possibility of transmission is higher. JSD also upgraded HVAC filters throughout the District and went even further by purchasing hospital grade HEPA filtration units for each classroom in the district to improve air circulation per CDC recommendations. When it was recommended that school districts provide staff with asymptomatic COVID testing, we contracted with Quest labs to have tests sent to staff member's homes. However, only 30% of staff members took advantage of the free testing. On January 14, 2021 when CDPH updated their guidance again to recommend voluntary staff and student asymptomatic COVID screening weekly, the District contracted with the State's testing lab. The JSD COVID testing facility will have a soft opening Thursday, February 18, 2021. It will be open for staff the following week and students when they return to in-person instruction. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was purchased for each school site, which includes surgical masks, hospital grade hand sanitizer, gloves, mechanical barriers, and signage. Finally, in partnership with San Joaquin County Public Health Services and San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE), educators throughout the county are beginning to receive COVID-19 vaccines this week. What we do know is JSD continues to go above and beyond other school districts across the state that have safely reopened to in-person instruction.

Based upon all of the safety measures put in place, it was clear that JSD schools were safe to continue the Board's phased opening to in-person instruction on February 16, 2021. Despite the negotiated Memorandum of Understanding with the Jefferson Teachers Association, on February 12, 2021 students, families, dedicated teachers and the District were blindsided by the cease and desist letter from the California Teachers Association (CTA) Legal Department in Sacramento on behalf of the Jefferson Teachers Association (JTA). The District responded to this letter with supporting documentation received on February 12, 2021 from San Joaquin County Public Health Services. The letter states that Jefferson School District is considered open and could continue its phased opening plan. When the District did not receive a response from CTA/JTA it had no choice but to notify parents and heartbroken students of the fact that school would not be able to start on February 16, 2021 as planned. The District wanted to make sure parents had time to plan for childcare and other necessary arrangements. The District hoped to receive a response from CTA/JTA accepting the supporting documentation from the local health authority. Instead on February 16, 2021 JTA leadership requested additional legal documentation further challenging the ability of the District to continue its phased opening.

Jefferson School District does not believe it is in the best interest of our students to litigate with the California Teachers Association the nuances of what the word "open" means or who has the legal authority to constitute a school district "open" for in-person instruction. For this reason, the Board has decided to set an opening timeline that is clearly defined and defensible without further legal action. San Joaquin County's adjusted case rate is currently 25.1 cases per 100,000. It is expected this will drop well below the required 25 cases for 100,000 on February 23, 2021. The District will be required to wait five additional days before it continues its phased opening plan. For this reason, in-person instruction for TK-6th grade students that requested to return to in-person instruction will begin March 3, 2021. The District will continue to work with CDPH to determine when it is eligible to bring in-person instruction for 7th and 8th grade students.

MSA (Jackman/Carlson) motion to direct the Superintendent to plan for a March 3rd reopening for TK -6 grades or as soon as it is legally permissible.

Roll Call Vote:

Ayes – 5

Nays – 0

Absent – 0

Abstain – 0

Carlson, Jackman,
Raya, Wingo, Wells

Mr. Wells thanked the public for attending and thanked them for their patience during this difficult time.

ADJOURNMENT – MSA (Jackman/Raya) 8:11 PM

Respectfully submitted,

James W. Bridges
Secretary to the Board