

**WEST NORTHFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT 31**  
**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Per SP2135 the District 31 Board Meeting was held electronically and in-person in the**  
**Field Learning Center, 3131 Techny Road,**  
**November 11, 2020 8:00 PM**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order by President Melisa Choo Valentinas

**ROLL CALL**

Board Members:

Present:

Daphne Frank	Virtual
Nancy Hammer	Virtual
Robert Resis	Virtual
Jeffrey Steres	Virtual
Maria Vasilopoulos	Virtual
Melissa Choo Valentinas	Virtual
Laura Greenberg	Virtual

District Administration:

*Present:*

Dr. Erin K. Murphy, Superintendent of Schools - In Person

*Virtual:*

Mrs. Catherine M. Lauria, Asst Superintendent Finance & Operations/CSBO - Virtual

Dr. April Miller, Principal Field Middle School

Mrs. Shaton Wolverton, Principal Winkelman School

Dr. Janine Gruhn, Director of Special Education

Mr. Nino Alvarez, Winkelman Assistant Principal

Mrs. Becky Mathison, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction

A quorum of the Board was confirmed by President Melissa Choo Valentinas

## RECOGNITION OF AUDIENCE

In person public comment - 6th Grade Science Teacher, Field Middle School, Heather Stodola read the following comment:

Dear Members of the board,

Just when we thought 2020 wasn't enough, how about throwing in some tornado warnings for fun? Seriously though, I wanted to address 2 things tonight that I think need to be at the front of any discussion- safety and curriculum.

I know one of the biggest concerns is how will our students continue to learn at the high level we expect if we are remote? I know that for many the spring wasn't ideal, but even then I saw teachers step up. What has happened since that has been incredible- I've seen teachers creating STEM workstations, compiling art kits, obtaining ukuleles for kids at home, creating labs and conferencing with each student about their writing. No matter where they are learning, kids are thriving. Not only that, but I also think the students are all learning new levels of patience and compassion that are such important skills,

What is starting to take away from that high level of education, in my opinion, is the extreme exhaustion of our staff. Now I can only speak for Field, but dual teaching has been a lot. Making sure to include the students in class and at home, engaging them all simultaneously, and in a way that is 6 feet apart is testing all of our creativity and many of us are still trying to collaborate with each other long into the evening. With the numbers rising, and the cases in our schools and home communities up, it is even harder to plan, not knowing if we will go remote, we will get a call that we need to quarantine, or even if there will be someone to cover our classes if we do. Closing now would give an opportunity for numbers to drop, and teachers to feel more confident that they will be the ones providing the content to their students everyday.

My other concern is the health and safety of all stakeholders. When we were forced to close in March, who knew we'd still be in this weird place in November? Not only that, but people will move inside more due to the weather and the numbers are on the rise. We are doing a fantastic job in the buildings trying to keep things clean and safe, but it's not just about us anymore, it's about the fact they say that schools reflect their community numbers, and the Township numbers are red. I am also worried that teachers may fall ill based on how run down and stressed things are. If I get sick, I can't teach, and really that's what I'm looking to be able to do.

I think we need to also consider the social emotional health of our families, students and staff. The holidays are usually a time of family, rest, and restoring energy for the second half of the year. Many of us may not be able to see family, and I can tell you that weighs heavy on our hearts and emotions. I want kids to be able to see grandparents if they feel like they can do so safely, and not

have to worry about if they will need to quarantine, or not see family if that's not an option. Personally, my grandma is 100, there isn't necessarily a chance to wait to see her next Christmas. So many parents are already fortunate enough to work from home, let's give everyone in the district the opportunity to see those they love if they can.

Please know we aren't looking to get out of work, or an excuse to do less. We aren't against in-person learning, we are worried about unsafe learning. The teachers at District 31 put their hearts and souls into this work, and we hope you recognize that we need to prioritize safety.

Superintendent Erin Murphy read the following comments:

Dear Board members,

The governor's announcement that we begin Tier 2 resurgence mitigation in many IL counties including Suburban Cook County, does not impact schools. The limit on group size is not applicable to students participating in-person learning. The positivity rate for our region have been increasing, however; hospitals and healthcare facilities in our district are not overwhelmed by the recent surge. The current in-patient and ER room occupant numbers have increased but the overall number remains relatively low. Since the re-opening of the school, there are only a couple of reported cases. This shows the established procedures the school has in place are effective in reducing COVID transmission.

Please keep the students with working parents in mind when making the decision to halt in-person learning. Parents who are not working from home will face the challenge of providing the academic support needs for their kids. Families with financial constraints may not easily find help with remote learning. Please keep ALL students in mind when making decisions that can affect them academically and emotionally.

Thank you,

Anna

Thank you to all the staff and board members for keeping the schools open. Please consider remaining open as we have no help for childcare as parents we both work in the healthcare field and have not had the luxury to work from home. Please have a plan for parents if we do go back to remote learning a resource to send our children for remote learning for the essential workers that is caring for our community. Thank you again for hearing our voices in the community.

After Monday's staff meeting, I couldn't help but wish to express my opinion and feedback regarding the current environment at school.

Each day I report to school, I feel comfortable and safe working within the building. I see custodians as well as staff doing the necessary steps to ensure cleanliness and health safety for everyone. Compared to my friends who work as police, in business or in retail/grocery, I see the difference we do to ensure our health and safety for both us and the students.

Secondly, our students and parents do a tremendous job to follow health rules and protect themselves. My students are very active in ensuring they are healthy by wearing their masks, washing their hands and keeping distance when they can. The students are very determined to want to stay in school and have taken the ownership in ensuring they do what they can to remain here which is a great sight to see.

I respect my coworkers and their opinion but they do not represent the whole school. Our district has done such an amazing job to allow our students to succeed and be healthy in school that it would be a major step back to stop.

Appreciate your time to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Eric

It is my understanding that there are not enough substitute teachers. What is the status of the contract with Kelly Services? Thank you

Thank you to Dr Erin Murphy and all the teachers and staff for keeping our schools open! We probably don't say it often enough how much we appreciate you going above and beyond this year in order to continue to educate our kids. Kids are extremely happy with how in-person school is going and are very anxious of the

possibility that it may close again. Please keep the schools in person for as long as possible in order to provide both a quality education and a very important social outlet to our kids.

Please consider mental health of our kids before making any decisions to go into elearning mode. They rely on the socialization time during the school day which is extremely difficult to do via elearning. Thank you again!

Dear District 31 Board of Education members,

Thank you for hearing and reading this public comment this evening.

I would like to first start by thanking the Board for their vote to allow choice in our district, especially during this difficult, emotion-filled year. I would like to thank the administration and staff for their creative and tireless work to make this year successful thus far for so many differing needs among our families. And, I would like to thank our parent community for following the protocols in place to keep our students safe in the classroom and learning in both in-person and remote environments.

Tonight, I encourage the Board members to direct the administration to continue their work in offering choice for both families and their teachers. I would like to keep the students in person as long as we can safely. In reviewing our dashboard for opening, we are still in line with many of the metrics but, like the IDPH, I ask that you fine-tune specific details as we continue to learn more about this virus.

With regard to the Northfield Township Local Public Health Monitoring Dashboard, we are greater than the original 8% limit. This was set in August and we do know that our district can offer safe instruction in person. In reading the information from the Illinois Department of Public Health today, there have been no major changes in the overall recommendations, instead they have only adjusted specific details as they continue to learn about this virus. There is a growing number of sources stating the spread of this virus is not happening in schools like we originally thought. This is supported by higher COVID numbers, even locally, in the remote student population versus the in-person population. With the hard work this district has done, I feel incredibly safe sending my three children to Winkelman and Field. Again, this is due to the diligence of our teachers and staff. I would like to ask you to raise this metric number in light of our proven ability to manage in-person safety protocols.

IDPH/CCDPH places no restriction on school opening and this continues to be the case.

Scheduling and Procedures Generally Allow for Six Feet Social Distancing Per IDPH, ISBE, AAP, CDC and this continues to be the case.

7-10 Day Supply of PPE and Sanitation Materials are available now in better supply than they were previously. Do we need to check this stock and raise the expectation to keep people feeling safe?

With regard to Staffing and Substitutes, I have heard rumors that there are more teachers out sick recently. And, I have also heard that the number of required substitutes is not sufficient. Like many parents from whom I have heard in the last 48 hours, we believed this was no longer a concern with the hiring of Kelly Services. I am deeply concerned and confused why this is still the case as this was first introduced in July. Since hearing of this on Monday, there are parents working to advertise and even apply to be subs to keep their children in-person. Some of these are working parents willing and able to take a day off to offer this assistance. With the understanding of urgency, could our district look at creative options to find substitutes? Can we work with other districts to better pool available subs? Can we pay them a higher rate, which seems to have worked in D225? Can we actively recruit at local colleges that specialize in education? Could we plan for a short adaptive pause of 1-2 weeks to work on this specific limitation in earnest?

Student Attendance protocols have been so well tracked. Even my young children understand the protocols and move through the necessary transitions as needed because they understand the importance of their in-person learning.

I understand the difficulty of this decision. As someone who plans to run for this Board of Education in the April election, I am putting myself in your shoes as I write this. I encourage you to remember that you are elected officials, making decisions on behalf of a wide breadth of constituents, often much different than yourselves. Please consider your decision to include those that are in need of in-person learning whether for special education, English learning or support because both parents work. Please remember that District 31 has always been proud of their unique qualities and abilities to enact policies quicker than other surrounding districts. I believe we can do that in this situation as well.

Thank you for your thoughtful considerations of this letter.

Regards,

Meredith Estes

Parent of 2nd grade and 6th grade students

My son attends 2nd grade at Winkelman and has been doing in person learning since the start of the school year. I want to commend Dr Murphy and the entire team for all they have done this year to keep our children safe and provide us with an in person option for school. I wrote the Board a few weeks ago asking that if there was a choice to keep our school open even though numbers were rising that I encouraged them to do so. Even though we had a Covid positive case in my son's class I was comforted that it hadn't spread and everyone remained safe. Now however, seeing how much the numbers have increased and with the inevitable risks associated with the Thanksgiving holiday I have changed my mind. Staying in person during the holiday season not only puts our children at greater risk but the Winkelman staff and teachers as well. Everyone has to make their own decision on how they spend their holidays. Some will choose to do so with out of town family, or in small groups and some will choose to quarantine and I pass no judgment on anyone and the choice they make. But keep in mind that the Winkelman staff and teachers also have a right to see their family and friends this holiday. Imagine one of them wants to go visit their family in Wisconsin and they need to quarantine afterwards for safety. We will be in a substitute situation. I would much prefer my child have his same teacher via eLearning instead of substitutes who quite frankly aren't as well versed in our safety protocols. And I think if we can manage through eLearning during the holiday season it reduces the risks for everyone at the school and in our community. We have been very lucky so far that we haven't had a spreading event and everyone should be commended, but let's not get overconfident. Let's be cautious during these rising levels and demonstrate to our teachers and staff that we care about them and we appreciate everything they have done for our children these past few months. We have all known this could be a possibility and I would like to see us be proactive versus reactive. I encourage the board to consider switching to full remote learning during the holiday season from Thanksgiving to New Years and revisit in-person after Jan 1. I very much want my child in school as eLearning was not a great success for our family but I also want to be realistic about how our community will be at greater risk after Thanksgiving particularly with the rising numbers. Thank you.

Dear Dr. Murphy and the Board of Education,

I would like this email to be read out loud at the Board of Education meeting on 11/11/20.

I would like to thank the administration, the board, the teaching staff for all the efforts to make the school year successful thus far. I appreciate the transparency that you are providing our community,

I have children GBS, Field, and Winkelman school. I am in healthcare and work at a local hospital. I prioritize safety. My husband and I chose to send our kids to school for in-person learning.

Sending my children to school does not mean I do not care about teachers or their health as I have heard others state in previous meetings.

Data provided by Dr. Murphy has shown the community that transmission of Covid is not occurring at our school. When there is a positive case at Winkelmann, we are not requiring the entire class to quarantine. Our protocols are working! I implore to consider this as you discuss your approach to the adaptive pause for our district.

With regards to the substitute shortage, is there a link to the increased number of substitute teachers needed in the district and the Covid-10 rate at our school? Is our recruitment methods working?

If we are not able to meet substitute needs as described in the dashboard, I support the board in revisiting the issue as defined in the metrics.

If you choose to consider remote learning, I request that you evaluate how surrounding districts are addressing remote learning. Our younger kids struggle more with technology as compared with the older kids. District 30 had instituted 100% in-person learning for Kindergarten through 3rd grade and hybrid for grade 4-8 for the families that chose to send kids in-person.

At a minimum, please consider variation of this model by allowing K-3 to continue to be in-person. This would potentially help with the substitute shortage as you would have a smaller number of teachers in school.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Seema Patel

Hello Dr. Murphy, Administration and Board Members,



To begin, we thank you for taking time to read our letter and all that you have done for our district and community. To lead the district takes so much time and dedication and for that, we appreciate all your efforts.

We are writing to you today to have our letter read publicly at your board meeting to hear our voices and opinions on the matter on in-person learning. While many of our coworkers are more vocal in stating their position against, there are a number of us who are in favor of continuing in-person learning. We are worried our perspective won't be heard and we fear our voices will be silent because of those who speak louder.

Over the last three plus months we have felt very comfortable with teaching in person to educate and support our students and community. The difference with in-person to remote learning is as clear as day when comparing the remote learning in the spring to the in-person learning this fall. Our students have adjusted to the changes and have growth tremendously socially and academically. The students want to be in school and have done the required steps to continue to remain in person. The maturity of our students should not be overlooked as they have stepped up to the plate to ensure they remain in school by wearing their masks for hours on end, constantly cleaning their hands and surface areas, maintaining distance from their friends and adjusting to the style of learning that comes with Covid restrictions. These students are role models to people everywhere about how to overcome life in 2020 to succeed and live a somewhat normal life.

Our parents have also stepped up to ensure we are healthy and productive at work. Parents are filling out the daily screeners, sending their children with extra masks/cleaning supplies, donating funds/equipment to the school and working with us when students do have to be quarantined, to allow us to perform our duties. To see such support makes us as teachers feel that we can successfully do our jobs and enrich the children. We are so thankful to the Ed Foundation and PTO to help us as well as our room parents to allow us back in school to feel safe and appreciated for our work.

Finally, we can't help but notice and recognize the work of our staff. We see custodians constantly on the move cleaning and restocking supplies in our rooms. Assistance helping to support classrooms outside of their own to keep students healthy and safe. Admin constantly on the run to fill in gaps and help where is needed. Then there are the teachers who are cleaning, structuring lessons and ensuring students are learning while being healthy in school. Everyone who works in the school has gone above and beyond to ensure everyone is healthy, comfortable and successful. While there may be some people who fail to

follow recommendations by eating lunch without masks close together or not doing the extra steps to maintain distance, we feel the few shouldn't punish the many. As a whole, the staff of D31 has done all steps to allow us to have a successful in-person school environment.

For our school district to shut down and go back to full remote would be a huge step back in the growth and development of our community. Parents rely on us to provide in-person learning so they can perform their duties as parents. To go back to full remote will be damaging to the students mental health as well as educational development of our students. We see day in and out how beneficial in-person learning is and will continue to be for our students.

We all need to make sacrifices in life to support the greater good of the world and as teachers, we believe that our job is to enrich our students to provide them skills to be successful in life. Our students need and deserve in person learning to give them the social emotional and educational growth that they need for the future as well as giving our families the resource they need to show that we love and care for the students.

Please consider the needs of the greater good and not just those that complain while making your decision as in-person learning is working and will continue to work as we are doing all the steps needed to it's success.

Thank you for all your do and for your time.

Sincerely,

Concerned Teachers

If we go remote can we have one classroom for essential workers that need in person teaching for their children. Thank you again to the staff and board.

Thank you for all you've done to keep the schools open and for our kids. IDPH today said that they are recommending everyone does only essential things.

And while education is essential and as much as I would love to see my daughter stay in school as she benefits from it, I believe that D31 should consider going fully remote, even without a state mandate.

It is within our abilities (thankfully with technology) to step up our measures to keep our D31 community, including our teachers and staff, and the greater community safe and do what we can to control the spread.

## DISCUSSION ITEMS

Superintendent Erin Murphy updated the Board of Education [Health and Safety Information](#):

- Reviewed the benchmarks given to us by the Illinois Department of Public Health.
  - Dashboard shows that in region 10, North Townships, North Townships plus adjacent zip codes are all in red and no more yellow or green. This was updated every Wednesday afternoon by IDPH. This tells us that we need to continue with IDPH for guidance on what we do. Dr Kiran Joshi, Senior Medical Officer and Co-Lead of Cook County Department of Public Health answered some of our township superintendent questions.
  - Some of the questions asked were:
    - Given the current numbers, what do they mean for schools operating in-person learning?

While we have not been in IDPH's "Orange" designation for two weeks, all four measures tracked on the [IDPH website](#) for suburban Cook County are indicative of substantial community transmission, and we are currently under Tier 1 mitigation. We do look at the totality of the evidence when assessing transmission levels, and I think it's safe to say we're substantial at this time."

- Is it safe to be operating?

As per [CCDPH's clarification](#) of [IDPH's Adaptive Pause guidance](#), operating in person learning or a hybrid model in the setting of substantial community transmission would be considered high-risk, and schools should "strongly consider alternative learning modalities including moving to remote-only instruction as quickly as feasible."

- Should schools transition to remote learning?

As we've communicated previously, the decision to transition to remote learning is made at the district level. Schools with in-person learning either predominating or as part of a hybrid model should consider moving to remote only-instruction out of an abundance of caution. If schools opt to continue in-person instruction, CCDPH

recommends schools conduct more frequent (e.g., daily or twice-weekly) self-risk assessments and pay strict attention to the possibility of school-related transmission.

- What advice can you dispense for schools that may not yet be experiencing "outbreaks" or levels of spread consistent with what is being seen in the community? Is an adaptive pause the prudent measure in light of what is already considered high risk for in-school operations?

The recommendation to strongly consider remote learning is based on the presence of sustained community transmission and does not require there to be detectable school transmission.

- Given the current circumstances, can CCDPH issue actual recommendations for schools with respect to adaptive pause similar to what is being done in Lake and DuPage counties?

As we've communicated previously, the decision to transition to remote learning is made at the district level. Schools with in-person learning either predominating or as part of a hybrid model should consider moving to remote-only-instruction out of an abundance of caution. If schools opt to continue in-person instruction, CCDPH recommends schools conduct more frequent (e.g., daily or twice-weekly) self-risk assessments and pay strict attention to the possibility of school-related transmission.

- Reviewed the sub chart that is published every week. This is the District tracking information. The last two weeks show us mostly in red. The last week shows double digits for substitutes shortage. There have now been three consecutive days at both schools of substitute shortage which causes this conversation on whether we should close.
- Reviewed teacher's increasing number of absences wherein Superintendent Erin Murphy stated that teachers have to follow the same guidelines:
  - Teachers are feeling symptoms (just like kids) and need to stay home for ten days, get a doctor's note, or get a negative Covid test. We have had positive staff cases.
  - With the increasing numbers, Covid results are taking longer to get.
  - Teachers become close contacts and need to quarantine for 14-24 days.
  - Teacher's children/family members become close contacts or daycares close

- due to positive cases. May be home for 14 days.
  - Assortment of medical procedures for self or family, deaths in family, etc.
- Superintendent Erin Murphy reviewed our substitute status:
  - At the end of the the 2020 school year we had 38 subs in our sub pool (varying degrees of subbing)
  - When asked over the summer, 8 said they would be interested in subbing and 5 said maybe.
  - Only one sub has actually subbed this year. One is subbing as a remote assistant.
- We currently have the following subs:
  - 2 long term subs for extended absences
  - 4 regular subs
  - 3 permanent subs (one works remotely).
- In addition, we have hired supervisors to assist with non-instructional monitoring:
  - 3 bus drivers
  - 3 additional people. However, one will be returning to school after break.

After review of all the information Superintendent Erin Murphy's recommendation is that District 31 takes an adaptive pause (all remote) from Thanksgiving through January 15, 2020. The last in person learning day would be November 23, 2020 and intend to return on January 19, 2020.

- Superintendent Erin Murphy reviewed the work that will be done during the pause:
  - Focus on recruitment of subs
  - Through Kelly - they have started recruiting process
  - Independent - our efforts won't stop
    - Virtual open house to talk to parents/community interested in signing up to be subs
    - Work with parents who have expressed interest to get licenses
    - Explore increasing pay
    - Explore options for faster testing in order to decrease absences
    - Continue to work on the re-registration process so we can ensure a smooth transition back to learning after the pause.
    - Continue to monitor community spread

Member Nancy Hammer suggested stating that we pause until January 5th and then from now until our next Board of Education meeting, decide if we need to extend the return until January 19th based on the information collected during that time.

Secretary Daphne Frank expressed concern that waiting until our December Board of Education meeting would be too close to the January 5th date and parents need time to plan for childcare etc.

Member Jeffrey Steres requested Superintendent Erin Murphy to give her rationale on the dates chosen to be on pause. Superintendent Erin Murphy stated that she wants to give parents/teachers enough time if we needed to make a change. Both parents and teachers need time to transition.

Vice President Laura Greenberg requested that we be clear on why are we closing, what does that mean and when are we opening. What is the message we are hearing from the teachers? Vice President Laura Greenberg questioned if this is a safety decision or a lack of substitutes decision. Superintendent Erin Murphy stated that the chart both showed red. It is both safety and lack of substitutes. District 31 has created a very safe environment. We are seeing the environment around us change and is making a difference in our attendance. Principals from both schools have most of their teachers feeling safe and know that the District has taken great safety precautions but they are worrying as the numbers are going up.

Member Robert Resis questioned if there has been any consideration of not doing an adaptive pause for K-3rd grade between thanksgiving and the winter break. Superintendent Erin Murphy stated they have not looked at that because what we are looking at is the general community and what is going on. We do not think that would solve our problems. Assistant Superintendent of Special Services is looking into ways to support needy students.

Member Maria Vasilopoulos stated that she is worried about COVID and that it is getting closer to home however she feels that her children would not catch it from going to school. In many cases, she feels that her children would be safer in school. In articles that she read, they state that school is not a place of transmission and that all of the cases the District 31 has dealt with did not start in our school. Different choices of travel and gatherings will be made by families. Member Maria Vasilopoulos stated that COVID testing is taking longer to receive the results and questioned if we can get something in place to get it done sooner for our teachers by testing on site and connecting with firms. Possibly join forces with our neighboring districts to create a site to make that happen. Member Maria Vasilopoulos is disappointed in our substitute teaching pool. She is requesting we look at increasing salary rates. Making our substitute teachers pool stronger should be our first priority.

Member Jeffrey Steres agreed with his colleagues and echoed that we need to be clear as to why we are taking an adaptive pause. We know more now such as how we can keep our students and staff safe in our environment. Member Jeffrey Steres stated that he is very concerned about what happens after January. If we take a break after Thanksgiving and winter break so that people can celebrate or do what they choose to do. There are additional activities and events in that second term such as spring break and other holidays. Are we going to have to take similar pauses so people can make these discretionary choices? It could add up to 20% of our school year where we have to be remote to accommodate those choices. Member Jeffrey Steres likes the idea of live streaming every class everyday.

President Melissa Choo Valentinas stated that the substitute issue is an issue within the township. President Melissa Choo Valentinas questioned how much the Board of Education can create workforce solutions like investing in a pool of subs or having co-teachers.

After further discussion the Board of Education decided that the last day for Field in person students would be November 13th and Winkelmans last day in person would be November

20th and commit through January 4th which is teacher institute day. The first day back for students would be January 5th and will decide at the November 19, 2020 Board of Education meeting if we need to extend the opening.

## **ADJOURN**

Secretary Daphne Frank made a motion to adjourn. Member Jeffrey Steres seconded the motion.

Final Resolution:

Aye: Robert Resis, Daphne Frank, Melissa Choo Valentinas, Nancy Hammer,  
Maria Vasilopoulos, Jeffrey Steres, Laura Greenberg

Nay: None.

The motion passed 7:0 at 10:08PM.

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**Board President**

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**Board Secretary**

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**Date**