

Minutes of the Meeting

Type of Meeting: SALT BROOK PTA Meeting
Date: January 12, 2022 (Zoom)
Time: 9:30 AM – 10:30 AM
In Attendance: Mrs. Drexinger, Mr. Firetto, Mrs. Spoerl, Dr. Miceli (Head of BoE), PTA board members and parents of Salt Brook School.

1. **Call to order and flag salute**
2. **Approval of Minutes- November 2021 Meeting:** Approved without any objections or corrections.
3. **Principals Report:** Principal report is attached below.
4. **Teachers Representative:** Mrs. Spoerl
 - a. 6th Graders from clubs were pulled out to make a video during the hour of Code Week. SWAG members interviewed students, SWAT team members were behind the scenes of the camera, Broadcasters clubs did the opening about the video. SWAT team members edited the videos and spent hours doing it.
 - b. We are going to show the video and its about 10 min long.
5. **Presidents message / Announcements**
 - a. **Presidents Message:** (*Diana Ettinger*)
 - a. *Again a mention of the Superintendents forum.* There is a link on the salt brook home page, it's a good read with information about all grades.
 - b. Link to the Covid form in on the homepage.
 - b. **Treasurer Report:** (*Ana Roth*) *Report for October 2021.* Available on the website
 - c. **Correspondence Report:** (*Urmi Mukerjee*) Thank you letters from teachers and staff of Salt Brook in appreciation of the gift cards and lunch organized before the holidays by the PTA.
 - d. **Committee Reports:**
 - a. **Trivia Night:**
 - a. *Coming up next Friday Jan 21st.*
 - b. *It will be virtual and will be on Kahoot*
 - c. *Cost is \$20 per family*
 - d. *Questions are intended to do for Kids and parents to do together.*
 - e. *Sign up available on membership toolkit.*
 - b. **Chess Club:**
 - a. *Chess club started online in the fall and was very successful. They meet twice a week, one day is coaching and the next day is dedicated to playing games.*
 - b. *A new winter session will start this Friday.*

- c. *Sign up is open for grades 1 -6.*
- d. *Cost of the session is \$36.*
- c. **Spelling Bee(Urmi Mukerjee):**
 - a. *Spelling Bee event has been pushed to a date when attendance in school picks up.*
 - b. *Classroom bee words have been sent out to the students before the holidays*
 - c. *Planning to have the event in person and not online this year.*
- d. **Author Day (Elizabeth Lee):**
 - a. *Event scheduled for March 3rd. As of now its scheduled to be an in-person visit. We do have the option to switch to virtual if need be.*
 - b. *Guess the Author contest is going on this week, where Mrs. Demich is giving out clues to the students. Kids can fill out the Google form each morning, and one winner will be announced from each grade and they will receive prizes.*
 - c. *Book sales will begin next Thursday. More information will follow. Books will be offered at 20% discount and will be signed and personalized by our guest author.*
- e. **Sweetheart Dance:**
 - a. *Usually in the winter but we might have to move to June 23rd and do it potentially outside or hopefully if the situation around Covid is better.*
- f. **STEM Fair: (Diana Ettinger):**
 - a. *This event will be virtual as last year. STEM fair will kick off on Jan 31st. Will be sending out information on registration around that time.*
 - b. *Event is scheduled for the evening of March 10th.*
- g. **Talent Show:**
 - a. *Was scheduled for end of January or February to avoid the virtual event. New dates to come out soon.*
- h. **Spring Fundraiser (Stacy Guntherman):**
 - a. *Dates for the event are Friday May 6th, 2022 at the Grove at Sterling Hotel.*
 - b. *There will be raffle baskets, silent auction item and bif ticket items.*
 - c. *More information in two weeks to follow.*

i.

6. **Open Forum:** *Rest of the forum discussed the items for the PTA sale.*

PTA MEETING
JANUARY 12, 2022

I. HAPPY NEW YEAR / Thank You!

- Toys for Tots - police community service drive. Huge participation from our SB families. Thank you so much for your generosity!
- Great to welcome everyone back in 2022!

II. REMINDER OF COVID PROTOCOLS

- Dress students warmly - will be trying to have them line-up outside in the morning as much as possible. Recess will continue to be outside even on colder temperature days. Students have the option to eat outside regardless of temperatures - only exception, raining/snowing.
- Teachers are monitoring classroom set-ups and distancing as much as possible
- Washing hands often with soap for at least 20 seconds;
- Covering coughs and sneezes and properly disposing of tissues;
- Limiting close contact with people who are sick and not sharing food, drinks and utensils;
- Practicing social distancing;
- Wearing a face covering; and
- As more students become vaccinated, less quarantining. Emails will be sent home to vaccinated student families informing them of contacts, but no quarantine will be needed.
- Things for parents to remember:
 - Staying home when you are sick;
 - Staying home when a household member is sick or has confirmed Covid
 - **If you are waiting for COVID test results, please remain at home and monitor your health.**

III. STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENTS

- Start Strong - Fall assessment, parents reports mailed
 - Designed to provide assessment information to educators, as well as parents
 - Indicates the level of support students may need throughout the rest of the school year
 - Teachers have analyzed results and modified instruction to meet needed support levels.
 - ESSER funds - Extra Support program began for students in Grades 1 - 3
- In View – Grades 3 and 5, February 3, 2022
- NJSLA (Grs. 3 - 6) and NJSL Science (Gr. 5) - Still scheduled by NJ State Dept. of Education. Tentative dates May, 2022

- We will communicate testing procedures to all parents as the dates get closer.

IV. SB CLUB “SPECIAL PROJECTS”

Hour of Code Movie

- In December, several 6th grade students from the Broadcaster’s Club, SWAT club (Students Who Assist with Technology) and the SWAG (Students With Attitudes of Greatness) club worked together to script, record, edit and produce an informational video highlighting the Hour of Code week at Salt Brook School. The video you are about to see was entirely done by these students! The students who created this video are highlighted in the closing credits!

V. GRANTS

- **DRIVE FOR AUTISM GRANTS** - Received a \$2,000 grant to supplement instruction. These funds were used to support our virtual reality program. Thank you to the Drive for Autism for their generous donation!
- **EDUCATION FOUNDATION GRANTS** – In process

VI. OTHER

- Tech Center of the Media Center renovation

Statement by Jennifer: About the food drive, community service project is coming up. We would like to do the Soup-er bowl as last year. Just to see what everyone wants to do that again and do it in the first two weeks of February leading up to Super Bowl. We might also reach out to the OLP food pantry and either add those items in addition or add it to another category of donations.

Mrs. Drexinger is good with doing it. The school, children and families enjoyed it and were very generous with their contributions.

Questions during Meeting:

Question: About Start Strong assessments. Based on your analysis, what can you share about how we are doing as a district? How do we compare to the rest of the state.

Answer by Mrs. Drexinger: I can share information on Salt Brook school; you can get more information from the district updates on this.

Start Strong assessment – Salt Brook Dashboard

Grade	Assesment on	Less support needed	Some support may be needed	Strong Support
4th	Language Arts	67%	16%	16%
	Math	67%	22%	12%
5th	Language Arts	80%	13%	7%
	Math	61%	25%	14%
6th	Language Arts	51%	33%	16%
	Math	43%	23%	28%

This will help fill in the gaps and plan instructions in school. We are waiting for the spring assessment and then will compare Fall to spring data. We are pleased with where we are and where we are headed. There have been huge gains in academics and socio-emotional learning coming out of Covid.

Question: Start Strong Assessment- Is this the same assessment that would have been given to the children a few years prior in terms of the material they were tested on or has the composition of the test changed to compensate for the lost time during Covid?

Answer by Mrs. Drexinger: Format of the test was slightly different in terms of the length and it was more multiple choice questions rather than open ended ones. There were differences than what the children will see in spring. Across the state different models were used by the state and Covid situation was taken into account.

Answer by Mr. Firetto: Length of the assessment, structure was different. Normally when the children take the assessment in spring they will see more open-ended questions, longer passages that they will read and respond to.

Question: What point in time were the tests geared for? If the student is in 6th grade were the children tested for beginning of 6th grade or end of the year?

Answer by Mr. Firetto: Its more towards the beginning of the year, like more towards the content they would have learnt in 5th grade into 6th grade. Its more of a snapshot what they have learned cumulating over the last couple of years. The test was a day each for Language Arts and Math. In the spring we will have longer assessment, believe its 2 days for LA and 3 days for Math and for 5th graders there will be a Science assessment as well. The assessment in spring is much longer than the assessment in fall.

Question: With the surge in Covid, what temporary layers of protection have you/are you adding?

Answer by Mrs. Drexinger: Continuing with the layers of protection we have been using all year. Teacher in January additionally, changed the class configuration to separate the students out to the greatest extent possible. Last week, after the holiday surge, we also changed up activities and collaborations and keeping students more in seats. We will go back once the surge is over. We will continue masking, washing of the hands, sanitizing, etc. has continued the same. The health and safety measure in school have never changed or compromised. The surge was mostly because of the holiday travels; the attendance in school is getting stronger, coming off quarantine. The school has been a safe place and we were able to maintain the integrity of the academic instructions despite all the previous Covid surges. We will move past this but we do take health and safety very seriously in school and haven't changed methods.

Question: Are you tracking in school transmissions anymore? On the dashboard, there is a message, which says because of the high cases we are not tracking anymore while these were numbers you pointed to parents last year.

Answer by Mrs. Drexinger: Tracking has become hard and here are some examples why:

- Over the holidays, we had couple of basketball team breakouts, while that's nothing to do with school but the circumstances on a rec

committee. Some children were in the same team and while that was not a school spread, it just means the BB team was affected by Covid. While the first case was on a Monday because of delays by basketball league and health department school only knew about this on a Sunday. In school transmission got dicey, because now we don't know if the transmission was in school or basketball team/other activities, slumber party !

- At friends houses, activities, walking around town they are not masked up unlike in school. Its difficult for us in school to track and so contact tracing in school became difficult.
That's why the tracing has been stopped. We haven't

Question written by parent read out in the meeting for dr. Miceli:
Questions is regarding Zoom access. According to the current policy, correct me if I have misinterpreted:

- a) If a student is Covid positive, they can have a Zoom access. If the student is ill for another reason, even if the symptoms are mild but they are forced to stay home, students don't get Zoom.
- b) If the student has Covid symptoms and is pending a PCR test, they can have access to Zoom. If the students have symptoms from a vaccine or booster shot they cannot.
- c) If a student with an immune-compromised family member or are compromised themselves. They can request for accommodations to presumably access Zoom. If a student lives with a family member with any other CDC confirmed reasons to put them at a higher risk for severe Covid illness such as obesity, heart condition, inability to be vaccinated like younger siblings or old age like 95-year-old grandma, they cannot be considered for accommodation.

Can you please explain the rationale behind this policy?
Specifically, please explain why you allow the immunocompromised situation consideration and why you don't allow all the other situations creating increased risk for severe illness consideration.

In conclusion, there is not a single parent in our district that does not want to have their child in school in person. Every parent recognizes the significance social, academic and emotional benefits of in-person learning for their children. No parent is casually deciding that the physical safety of their family outweighs all those benefits. So why can't you trust parents to make those decision for their family. As we reach the peak of this surge and watch the cases begin to drop again we can see this is a relatively short lived situation further demonstrated that some short-term

common sense flexibility would have benefited our children and families. Why specifically were you unwilling to provide this short term flexibility.

Answer by Mr. Miceli: Each of the bullet points were accurately accessed.

We have revisited these questions over the entire duration of the pandemic. We have accessed it from the administrative prospective that we are prioritizing in-person learning. We have seen the benefits of that from academic and social prospective over and over again. It is very difficult to be able to set practices and presidents for virtual learning. We made it clear that under Covid related situation that you indicated, we will offer Zoom. For other situations families might feel they need to stay home, they have access to Google classroom, as they would in any normal situation, outside of Covid. Prior to Covid when people were out for various reasons, either for flu or other immune-compromised reasons, the Google classroom opportunity was there or that has not changed. We have remained steadfast on the priority; we are not offering Zoom as an opportunity to be out there. The governor has made it clear from the onset of this year, that remote learning is not to be accepted. Its not something that anyone has taken lightly. It creates a huge burden on the staff to be providing remote instructions. It compromises their ability to do the work in the classroom. Focus changes and it compromises the ability of the in person effectiveness. Thru regulations, executive orders or our own personal/district /school experience this is the framework we believe is the best one for the whole community at this point.

Question: Clearly while social emotional learning is a priority. You may not be thinking about the other side of the coin. There is a lot of anxiety being created- students who are scared to catch Covid, or scared to get it and bring it to their vulnerable family members. Lots of kids have sibling that are too young to be vaccinated right now and I just want to make sure you are considering the other side of things. Its not having school open at all costs, it's not necessarily a situation that fosters social-emotional well being for all. Thinking a one size fits all approach, I don't know if that's right during the surge. You should be more flexible for families who more vulnerable family members and clearly want their kid in school and at the time are unable to do that.

Answer by Mr. Miceli: I understand your concern and where you

are coming from. When you talk about folks or families who have vulnerable folks in the household just to clarify are you suggesting they those folks have immune-compromised family members that are not being considered, because from the very onset of this we have indicated that anyone who does should reach out to their building principals to talk that through and see what those accommodations may need to be.

Clarity: Someone who is not vaccinated is more vulnerable to catching Covid, that's what I mean.

Statement: The pediatric hospitalizations for Covid, in the age group that is unvaccinated 5 and under is increasing the fastest, and in New Jersey specifically we have topped over 6000 hospitalizations, the most that we had ever during the entire pandemic. And obviously the rates of the pediatric cases are much higher than they ever were, regardless of whether people are getting Covid or not. I have a 2 year old who cannot be vaccinated, and I want my boys in school – all day everyday, in person, in extracurricular, the more the better. But we also have this other person in our family that we need to protect as well. And while I would personally not opt for Zoom for the year or even for a semester but it feels very inequitable that we are dealing with and getting very little understanding or assistance from the district. It's really hard to know what to do. Knowing that for a week or two during the worse surge of the pandemic, for children specially if I could keep them home or we could do half days or at least some of the risks were mitigated. As a parent trying to keep three children healthy, that would be extremely reassuring to know that it's an option, that we are being listened to, that the youngest member is being catered to by the community and it right now it just does not feel that way.

Statement:

I appreciate everything that Dr. Miceli, the school district, Mrs. Drexinger and teachers are doing. To second the previous point , my parents have a lot of health issues and while I want to visit them but while my son goes to school and might bring some infections back. They are extremely vulnerable, my step mom has kidney failure and my dad has a lot of underlying conditions and it impacts in a lot of different ways. My son on the other hand is doing much better in school in person vs on remote, but it just makes it very hard on everybody.

Mrs. Drexinger: We appreciate that and I think every family has circumstances, like people we would love to go visit weather its safe or not. With me being around my parents where I wear masks while we all are vaccinated and have booster shots. It's a challenging time

for everybody, regardless if the school is open or not. When the students are in school they are in masks, they are socially distanced, washing their hands. Families need to also take precautions in their own home we are not seeing cases spread among school children. If we were the district would have looked at things differently. While in understand the concerns of young kids at home, but again we see the spread is within the family, activities where they were unmasked and not from school. I do sympathize with the people, its very hard decision to make and there are so many circumstances for every family out there.

Question: The testing has been kind of a disaster, at the federal level or the state level. Do you think it might ever get to the stage where you would proactively test kids or staff? You might also have a better sense of what the spread might be like in the community, so you may be able to catch or mitigate things earlier. Or is that logistically like impossible to do?

Answer by Mr. Miceli: There are some pilot programs that have been shared with us as a district. They are also looking at doing some other proactive measures like extra curricular activities after school. So we have reviewed the protocol for these different scenarios with our nursing staff, administratively. Conceptually we like them a lot, but we simply don't have the ability or capacity or the staff to be able to accurately to follow through with all of it on a day to day basis, nor does the system allow for it right now. There will be lots of gaps in the process in itself for which the requirements and protocols are so specific, that if we don't follow them, then you are not effectively implementing the strategy. I had a meeting with Dept. of health officials and we talked specifically about this and everybody shared the same sentiments from a school based system that conceptually the protocol was fantastic but implementation is not feasible. Example, with respect to co-curricular the folks who are in musical or after school clubs/athletics we need to test all those students twice weekly. Right now it's been challenging to test all students once a week and get their results back during the week. So if we were testing students twice, we probably won't be getting the results back from the first test before testing again. If we could do regular testing and get results back would be fantastic. The capacity is a concern.

Answer by Mrs. Drexinger: In 20 years of being principal in Salt Brook school we have never sent out as many children as we have this year, we have spoken to families about evaluation or about getting extra assistance. It's a huge consideration when we make decisions for school. It might not affect the majority of the family,

even if it affects a few, we have to consider it.

Answer by Mr. Miceli: To be even more specific, when we use the term crisis, what we are referring to is suicidal ideation. With very young kids having very specific plans about how they are going to engage in that, and it's very real. Folks used to think this was an adolescent/high school thing but we are seeing it now as young as kindergarten. We also had a number of tragedies in town that people are aware of more so than in the past couple of years. It's not that the folks who have expressed their concerns today, it's not that you are not being heard, you are being heard and we appreciate you but when we are sitting and having these conversations we are looking at the big picture and what is the greatest threat here? The biggest threat is keeping kids home and isolated !

Question: Are there other layers that could be added? Mrs. Drexinger you had a good point, maybe the transmission is more from extracurricular activities and not from classroom? If testing capacity is too difficult can extracurricular be more limited to vaccinated individual or some sort of additional protections added like additional filtration where possible or enforcement of mask wearing. Like are there other things that can be done to limit that, because that's a huge source of community spread.

Answer by Mrs. Drexinger: The extracurricular at the elementary school would be more from the Recreation and the town. The only extracurricular's that we have is our after school clubs and our students are masked up and social distanced. We use the same measures in our after school clubs that we use during the school day. But while we may want to stop all extracurriculars it's not our decision, and there is a lot of research which shows the kids need to participate in these activities. I am 50/50 on it, maybe the rec should enforce masks while playing basketball, but I am not the coach and don't oversee those programs and I don't want to make judgments for those programs. But in terms of elementary schools all of our extracurricular are only done while students are masked up and using same protocols. The other programming comes outside of Salt Brook but unfortunately the children of SB may be affected by that.

Answer by Dr. Miceli: While talking to the nurses in our district, a large majority of the cases we have seen in the past couple of years are coming from outside activities and we have to grapple with it once they are in. We are not seeing the incidences of transmission within the school setting. Short of every family kind of quarantining, stopping all of our activities, not engaging in all the

other things that are happening outside it is really impossible for us to control any of that. We are really just receiving everybody on a daily basis and once people leave at 3 o'clock, it's very difficult for us to monitor what's transpiring outside of school, we hope that families are being responsible. We have seen the extreme impact and ramifications on students being isolated and the extreme need for them to be engaged not only in academics but also social and physical activities and as a result of the past 4 months, I can tell you first hand that, when we first came back in September we had an extreme number of crisis situations, interventions and issues across the district, significantly higher than we had seen before and that carried into October and little bit into November, by December we have seen a significant drop in these interventions across the district. We can attribute that to kids getting back to school, participating with their friends and in extra curricular activities, sports fully engage. What we have witnessed is risks of keeping kids home and isolated and not engaging in activities and the ramifications of that are far greater than what we have seen with respect to Covid, specifically in New Providence.