

1 Souhegan Cooperative School Board

2 Tuesday, August 17th, 2021

3 Meeting Minutes- Approved 09 27 2021

4 Attendees:

5 Administrative Team: Adam Steel- Superintendent of Schools

6 Souhegan Cooperative School Board: Chair- John Glover, Vice Chair- Stephanie Grund
7 Secretary- Laura Taylor, George Torres, Steve Coughlan, Christie Peters, and Pim Grondstra.

8 Board Minutes: Danae A. Marotta

9 Public: Timothy Kachmar, 15 Mack Hill Rd Amherst NH, Peter de Bruyn Kops, 377 Boston Post
10 Rd, Amherst, NH, Elizabeth Bryson, SHS Student, Brielle Berube, SHS Student, Keelin
11 Llewellen, Amherst Resident, Chris Ager, 4 Edgewood Run, Amherst NH, Lee Kachmar, 15
12 Mack Hill Rd Amherst NH, and Coberly Behn, 1 New South Drive, Amherst NH.

13 I. Call to Order

14 **Chair of the Souhegan Cooperative School Board, Mr. John Glover, called the meeting to**
15 **order at 6:04PM.**

16 II. Discussion

17 He noted that tonight the SCSB will be discussing pool testing for Covid mitigation. It is
18 something that the Task Force had originally considered then removed and the SCSB never got a
19 chance to discuss it. His role is to facilitate the discussion, and they will entertain public
20 comment.

21 They have a duty under the law as a school board to provide a clean, safe and healthy school
22 environment for all students. Covid-19 continues today and threatens their responsibility under
23 the law. They want to have an in person learning experience, that lasts as long as they can
24 muster. There are certain mitigations that they cannot do such as socially distance or offer dual
25 modalities. They do not have an ability to contact trace and only have control over the students in
26 the school building but not outside of the school setting. On the other hand, they can have no in
27 person learning and have all remote learning, but they do not want to do that. They can require
28 masks of everyone which they do not want to do. They can offer lunch outside, manage traffic
29 patterns, enable certain classes to go outside, and offer larger spaces for learning for social
30 distancing.

31 One of the challenges is trying to figure out how big the risk is. There are a lot of uncertainties
32 and they do not know how the delta variant will affect children. There are opportunities for
33 breakthrough cases. Having an ability to test our students, on some frequency, will offer them the
34 ability to gather empirical data, and it is fully funded.

35 Some of the questions of the testing program that need to be answered are the reliability of the
36 data, what to do with a positive test result, social/ emotional effects of testing. They are here to
37 decide if they want to add that to the toolbox of Covid mitigation.

38 Mr. Glover opened it up for board member commentary.

39 He inquired about the parameters, for pool testing for students. That program would yield a
40 result in 24 hours. One question is to decide if it would require certain students to participate or
41 if it will be an opt in strategy. He would need board member feedback and is outlining it for
42 discussion. These are the options that they have.

43 He noted that he is looking for feedback on A) is this something they should seriously consider
44 and B) if so, under what circumstances should this be deployed.

45 Ms. Taylor asked about the scientific evidence that supports asymptomatic testing of vaccinated
46 and unvaccinated students.

47 Mr. Glover replied that he does not have that information. In his personal opinion, gathering
48 empirical data is helpful. They do not know about asymptomatic transmission and there are
49 Covid cases of people that have been vaccinated.

50 Ms. Taylor asked about asymptomatic testing.

51 Mr. Glover replied that the pool test would be a PCR test, which detects asymptomatic cases.

52 Ms. Taylor asked if they looked into NH DHHS for asymptomatic testing. She added that they
53 do not recommend it. They have a problem with testing students without symptoms. It is not
54 recommended by NH DHHS and CDC.

55 Ms. Grund added that with pool testing it is a lot of work for a really low statistic. It will not help
56 them with the amount of work and effort. She does not believe that it is the way to go.

57 Mr. Coughlan mentioned that there is a case of cognitive dissonance here with two different
58 messages from the state.

59 Ms. Taylor remarked that she looked at the CDC website today.

60 Mr. Coughlan asked if was updated recently. He countered with pool testing it is 15 minutes per
61 week to get a sample.

62 Ms. Grund noted that is a less than 1% hit rate. She would like Advisory to check in.

63 Mr. Coughlan added that they do not know what the delta variant will do in the fall.

64 Ms. Peters mentioned that they have not done it here, but other places have.

65 Ms. Grund remarked that for any type of testing she would like to see the school status in orange
66 going into red. They are not anywhere close, and students have been around each other all
67 summer. She would like Advisory to check how kids are doing mentally first.

68 Mr. Coughlan asked Superintendent, Mr. Adam Steel, what would happen if a pool comes back
69 positive.

70 Mr. Steel replied that part of the policy of the school has to be what they do in response to that.
71 Typically, the process promoted by the company who has the contract with state is to do antigen
72 rapid testing for those students. Antigen tests are not great with asymptomatic cases. We are
73 going to give the parents the choice of getting their student tested on their own or being out of
74 school for a period of time to prove that they are not a carrier of that case.

75 Ms. Taylor asked if that was the entire pool.

76 Mr. Steel replied yes, that testing company recommended 10, it does not have to be 10.

77 Ms. Peters asked if you opt into pool testing you are essentially opting into other testing at some
78 point.

79 Mr. Steel replied, yes.

80 Mr. Glover asked for clarification.

81 Mr. Steel remarked that he is not in support of anyone being tested. However, if a parent opts
82 into pool testing, they would be opting into follow up testing as well should their child be part of
83 a positive pool test result.

84 Ms. Taylor asked about cost.

85 Mr. Steel replied if they don't want to take an antigen rapid test at the school, which would be
86 free, and wanted to get their own PCR test outside of school it would be at their own expense.

87 Ms. Taylor noted that they have students in their school that are vaccinated. The CDC and the
88 NH DHHS does not recommend testing vaccinated students. Even if they test positive, they do
89 not need to be quarantined, and only wear masks.

90 Mr. Glover added that they do not know who is vaccinated and they cannot ask.

91 Ms. Peters noted that you have to trust the parents with some of that control.

92 Mr. Glover remarked that they have an obligation to control what they can control. They should
93 all encourage positive personal responsibility. The advantage is that you can be ahead of the
94 situation and they can nip it in the bud. At the same time, they can put it as an optional opt in
95 thing and no one would participate.

96 Ms. Grund commented that they have not voted on the reopening documents. The delta variant is
97 different but last year the cases were managed well. It is less than 1% hit rate of testing.

98 Mr. Steel mentioned that it is 1 out of every 150.

99 Mr. Glover added that they could survey the community data which is part of the reopening plan.

100 Mr. Coughlan noted that they handled last year quite well. If they do the same this year, they
101 might see a lot of people quarantined unnecessarily.

102 Mr. Steel commented that the NH DHHS guidelines have changed in that only the student would
103 quarantine not the whole class.

104 Ms. Peters mentioned that they are looking at the news in other locations. She encouraged
105 classes to use larger areas in the school.

106 Mr. Grondstra remarked that he is in favor of using the NH DHHS and CDC guidance. He
107 echoed Ms. Peters.

108 Mr. Coughlan added that there are federal funds to do this.

109 Mr. Glover noted that the Governor has put it on the local districts to decide. If they are going to
110 change it, they need to know now and have that discussion and do it as a collective. He
111 recognizes the benefits, but it is not easy.

112 Mr. Torres remarked that he sees both sides and wants to hear feedback. In our current
113 environment, if they were to do testing, it has to be optional. He does not think that right now,
114 testing is required. He could not support it at this point.

115 Mr. Coughlan asked if optional was an option.

116 Mr. Steel replied, yes.

117 Mr. Coughlan asked if they could opt in during October, when circumstances could change.

118 Mr. Steel replied, yes.

119 Mr. Glover asked about the federal funding.

120 Mr. Steel replied that it is a block grant with \$41 or 46m for the entire state. As of right now,
121 there are only two districts that have begun doing it. He has no concerns that the state will run
122 out of funds for this.

123 Ms. Grund noted that she is not in support unless they see things going in a bad direction. She
124 asked to take a straw poll.

125 Ms. Peters remarked that they should hear from the public.

126 III. Public Comment

127 Mr. Timothy Kachmar, 15 Mack Hill Rd Amherst NH, noted that he is a regulatory scientist and
128 in the has been in the pharmaceutical industry since 1995. He has a background with FDA drug
129 approval. He added that the test will test for the RNA from the virus and not the Delta variant.
130 There is a lag between the variants and a lot of coronaviruses out there. You could have a
131 perfectly normal person that tests positive from a cold last year.

132 He read from the CDC's PCR Test Manual 07 21 2021 and asked why have they not validated it
133 with the actual virus. The probes that they use in the test diagnostic are not used in the actual
134 virus. Not once in the document do they mention viral isolates. Whatever testing they decide on

135 they will be using something completely inaccurate. To use testing to make decisions off of is
136 crazy, let the kids go to school.

137 Mr. Peter de Bruyn Kops, 377 Boston Post Rd, Amherst, NH, commented that he has a little
138 familiarity with the boarding school in Massachusetts last year. He encouraged the board to dig a
139 little more into the PCR testing. You can do a lot of harm to the kids with a false positive. He
140 would work hard to avoid attaching stigma. It is a tricky problem.

141 Ms. Elizabeth Bryson, SHS student, commented that the weekly testing of SHS student athletes
142 puts and unnecessary burden of time and stress on athletes and other students involved in
143 extracurricular activities. To ask them to put up with the testing is exceedingly unfair. She
144 thanked the board for their consideration.

145 Ms. Brielle Berube, SHS student, added that she is not in support for testing for athletics. It
146 would cause a false positive and take them out of school. It would cause more stress for the
147 students.

148 Mr. Chris Ager, 4 Edgewood Run, Amherst NH, commented that they should consider the non-
149 Covid effects on the students. Many of them lost a year of their youth and you don't need to
150 inject artificial fear. He thanked the board for their time.

151 An Amherst resident noted that her son is three. She added that they should not be making
152 students do what they do not want to do. She commented that the PCR test is sterilized with
153 ethylene oxide which is a cancer-causing agent. It should not be a thought.

154 Ms. Keelin Llewellyn inquired how would Covid pool testing work if she plays athletics through
155 Souhegan but attends the Derryfield School.

156 Mr. Glover replied that he does not have the answer, he will research, it is a unique case.

157 Mr. Peters asked how many are homeschooled and do athletics.

158 Mr. Steel replied that it is a decent number.

159 Ms. Lee Kachmar, 15 Mack Hill Road, Amherst, NH, noted her background as an
160 epidemiologist. She discussed that blanket testing is nonsense, the tests do not test anything. It
161 will add stress and nonsense. She suggested fever checks before a game or practice. If they have
162 a fever it is a sign of infection.

163 The masks are a whole other issue. There was a study that infant to 3-year-old had a 22-point IQ
164 drop in cognition. They went to 105 to 79. IQ's in the low 70's translates to a mild case of
165 cerebral palsy. Putting masks on kids is criminal, kids don't get Covid. She noted that it is not
166 the board's area of expertise and noted that Mr. Glover has been sick. Testing is a stigma when it
167 is unnecessary, and they need to go back to old school measures. This is not the Norovirus,
168 which is very airborne. To treat it over a year later like it is a bubonic plague is misguided and
169 wrong. They need to bring the fear level down for their children. There has been a 50% increase
170 in suicide in teens because of Covid and it is not based on science at all. She is concerned about

171 the funding they will receive. She worked 3 month on a Covid vaccine and resigned. She does
172 not think that they are bad people just misinformed.

173 Ms. Kachmar finalized her comments by adding that she will be at the SAU meeting on
174 Thursday.

175 Mr. Greg Fritz, Amherst NH, inquired what problem are they trying to solve.

176 Mr. Coughlan replied that they do not want to go back to remote schooling.

177 Mr. Fritz remarked that they should open the school without masks and testing. He added that he
178 is surprised that they are not trying to save children.

179 Mr. Glover responded that it is not the general policy to engage in dialogue. Their goal is to have
180 a clean, safe and healthy learning environment. There are uncertainties with Covid and they have
181 limited tools. Masks are in the toolbox. This discussion surrounds testing in keeping schools
182 open.

183 Mr. Fritz asked if the students are in danger in the schools.

184 Mr. Glover noted that they will decide, and this is the first time that they are discussing this.
185 They owe it to the board and the public to have this discussion.

186 Mr. Fritz added that he is still trying to understand the problem that they are solving. He asked if
187 they are trying to prevent death. He believes that it is the pressure from the media they are
188 watching. He noted that there is no problem here and thanked the board for their time.

189 Ms. Coberly Behn, 1 New South Drive, Amherst NH, remarked that in the past there were a lot
190 of unknowns, they need a breath of fresh air and no fear. The kids need to be mask free or
191 optional. Her children and their friends have had a lot of stress. She encouraged no masks and no
192 fear. The CDC has gone back and forth they need to stand up for the children now.

193 Ms. Kachmar added that kids are going to get sick. She inquired how long are they going to keep
194 the masks on.

195 Mr. Glover asked for further public comment.

196 Ms. Taylor read the public comment from Community Council Liaison, Ms. Maddy McFee:

197 *“ Respectively testing every student who participates in extra curricular seems excessive,*
198 *especially if they have no symptoms. I completely understand wanting to take extra precautions*
199 *but testing every single athlete seems extreme. Some of my peers have voiced concerns about*
200 *when the testing would take place and how long it would take. If every athlete is getting tested,*
201 *they are concerned it will take time out of their sports practice time or force their practices to be*
202 *pushed later than they already have been with the later start times. I believe students would be*
203 *willing to get tested if they have symptoms or if they have been around those with symptoms so*
204 *forcing weekly testing seems unnecessary.*

205 *Thank you,*

206 *Maddy McFee*”

207 Ms. Kachmar commented that the testing should be done at the doctor. The problems of testing
208 are enormous.

209 Mr. Glover asked for more comments from the public.

210 There were no further comments.

211 IV. Discussion

212 Mr. Glover asked for other board comments. He suggested they table the issue at this time. He
213 asked if they could evaluate this at a later date rather than eliminating this completely.

214 Ms. Peters noted that they have not received notes from parents that have been in support.

215 Mr. Coughlan inquired if there was a survey in the Spring.

216 Mr. Steel replied, yes, a PowerSchool survey went out in the Spring.

217 **Ms. Peters motioned not to proceed with any mandatory testing at this time. Mr.**
218 **Grondstra seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. Motion passed. (7-0)**

219 Mr. Glover thanked the public for their attendance and comments, it is important to hear from
220 them.

221 Mr. Torres noted that he wanted to reserve the right to reassess. They are not doing their jobs if
222 they do not reassess at a later date.

223 Mr. Steel noted that he was the one that brought this forward based on a concept the reopening
224 taskforce. At first blush it seemed to make sense. They went through the process with parent
225 subgroups and he has heard from a lot of parents. The survey this spring should not be relied
226 upon. What should be relied upon is our task force had lukewarm support for this at best and he
227 has taken his support away from it. The task force deserves recognition in helping to represent
228 the different stakeholders.

229 He concluded his comments with support for the Chair and the community.

230 V. Meeting Adjourned

231 **Mr. Grondstra motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:30PM. Ms. Taylor seconded the**
232 **motion. The vote was unanimous, motion passed.**

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