

MINUTES

RIALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Special Board Meeting of the Board of Education

March 15, 2021

Dr. John R. Kazalunas Education Center

Meeting was held virtually and available to the public

Via YouTube stream

Members Present: Joseph Martinez, President
Edgar Montes, Vice President
Stephanie E. Lewis, Clerk
Nancy G. O'Kelley, Member
Dina Walker, Member
Destiny Lopez, Student Board Member

Staff Present: Cuauhtémoc Avila, Ed.D., Superintendent
Darren McDuffie, Ed.D., Lead Strategic Agent: Strategics,
Congruence and Social Justice
Also present was Martha Degortari, Executive Administrative
Agent, and Jose Reyes, Interpreter/Translator

A. OPENING

Call to order - 4:00 p.m.

The Special Board Meeting of the Board of Education, which was held virtually and available to the public via YouTube stream, was called to order at 4:02 p.m.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board President, Mr. Joseph W. Martinez, led the pledge of allegiance.

C. PUBLIC COMMENTS

C.1 COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Any person wishing to speak on any item on the Agenda will be granted three minutes.

Cassandra Rodriguez, Rialto High School Teacher, indicated that as a teacher and mother of two children in the District, she believes it is imperative that outdoor physical activity is resumed for students who play sports. After being at home for a year, she indicated that she has seen her son become less and less active and more dependent on video games and social media. Sports have always been a positive distraction for her son and so many other students. She understands that while those who believe allowing their children to resume sports may be putting them at risk, she also understands that keeping their children home and away from the sports they love is also putting them at risk. She wants her son out on the field again and wants him to resume physical activity, to socialize with his teammates, and to play the game he has loved since he was four years old. She indicated that it is time to move forward and give kids back an essential piece of their lives.

Gina Teig, Parent of a Baseball Player at Carter High School, shared her appreciation for the meeting tonight and for once again discussing the possibility of allowing certain outdoor youth sports. She pleaded for Board members to make the right decision and allow students to go back on the field. Her son has been ready to return to sports; and she has talked to other parents whose children are also ready. She heard at the last meeting that the District and high school athletic directors have a plan in place with the safety of staff and students in mind. She questioned what more is needed, now that the guidelines released by the California Department of Public Health last month and the County of San Bernardino are in the Red Tier.

She indicated that as a wife, mother, and daughter of a cancer patient (who is currently under chemotherapy treatment), she wished that there was a pill/vaccine/magical potion that would protect everyone. She suggested that we try and get back to living our lives, and we the students and families make the choice.

Pablo Solano, Jr., Parent of students at Eisenhower High School, Kolb Middle School and Bemis Elementary School, shared that his children are ready to resume their lives, and are falling behind, while communities

around us are successfully moving forward. He said his children are doing travel ball, which takes them to many communities, mostly highly affluent neighborhoods, to create some normalcy in the lives of his children through sports.

He shared that regarding the pandemic, he is sure that all have suffered in one way or another, and some have been vaccinated, many were infected and recovered, including his family, and some have died. He indicated that there are clearly different levels to this, and suggested that the District provide the right avenue for those that are willing to responsibly reunite the community with sports.

Mr. Solano indicated that families need an outlet and children are at playgrounds throughout California, and questioned how long are we going to quarantine students and force them to live their lives on the internet and on tablets and iPhones? He is grateful that Frisbie Park reopened and is now busier than ever before and there is some progress. He requested that the District open up youth sports and reestablish our programs.

Christina Ortiz, Parent of Carter High School student, requested for the Rialto USD Board to approve the return of athletics for conditioning and competition. She indicated that so much has been taken from students this past year, that the return of athletics will help the overall mental health for a large group of students. She feels that it will help restart the mindset they need to keep up with their grades and maintain a regular schedule to help transition them into the next school year.

Ms. Ortiz indicated that in regards to the students that are not part of a competitive team, she is asking that options are considered for them as well. She suggested that maybe a system be put in place to reserve time to use the track to run or walk or to use the weight room at the limited capacity for gym services at 10%-25% capacity. This will allow all students an option to get out and exercise.

Crystal Lozano, Mother of two students at Kordyak Elementary School, said she appreciated the willingness to consider opening sports for the students in the District, as any form of activity with their peers will be a plus for their mental and physical health.

She requested that the District also reconsider opening the schools this school year instead of remaining on Bridge Academy. She asked that the District provide more up-to-date information, because relying on watching the board videos or the few written updates is distressing.

She indicated that all other neighboring districts are reopening, and Rialto USD is left in the dark with the same quote on the website from Dr. Avila. She feels it is starting to leave the impression that Rialto USD simply does not want to put in the effort to reopen as the other districts are.

Jonathan Otero, Varsity Soccer Captain for Carter High School, requested that the Board vote yes to return high school sports for competition. He plays on the Carter High Varsity Soccer team and would like to return to practice and compete with his team. He said this would boost his mental health to return to a small piece of normal.

Jonathan indicated that he has been playing with his club team since the summer with no issues regarding COVID and feels that with the same precautions, they can return to his varsity soccer team at Carter High School.

Laura Brown, Parent of Eisenhower High School Student, shared that after watching last week's Board meeting, she was concerned that some important points were not discussed in regards to the reopening of schools and athletic programs. She shared that effective February 26, 2021, Governor Newsom lifted the ban on youth sports saying that outdoor high contact sports can be played in counties in the red and purple tier as long as the case counts are below 14 per 100,000. San Bernardino County is now in the red tier with 6.7 cases per 100,000. The current numbers for Rialto are 9.4 per 100,000.

She indicated that kids have been asked to participate in school from their homes for over a year now and asked to stay inside to protect themselves from the spread of this horrible disease for over a year. She realizes that some have seen first-hand the heartbreak and fear this pandemic has brought, and as a mental health professional, she has also seen the increase in anxiety, depression, and suicide rates as a result of children being cut off from everything they have known. There is no longer a separation between school and home. The activities they once were involved in, from the time they were very young, are no longer available to them. She said that all these factors have played a part in students decrease in motivation and self-esteem; and although closure was necessary to help control the pandemic, we must find the courage to reopen and let our kids be kids again.

She explained that there have been many advances in treatments and currently there are three vaccines to help stop this disease from spreading. She knows there are safe ways to reopen schools in some capacity, and

athletics can be done outside observing the county public health rules of wearing mask being 6 feet apart and washing hands. This would be a start for kids to find some normalcy and begin to rebuild their social emotional health that has been damaged as a result of this pandemic. She realizes that as a Board, they are faced with a very difficult and important decision. There must, however, be balance in protecting the students physical well-being and social emotion well-being.

Rosa Fuentes, Community Member, requested that the Board make decisions based on the needs of the Rialto community and not the needs of the neighboring community. She understands that they have been presented with a lot of information on COVID-19 from the local community; however, she is surprised and very disappointed that the Board is discussing the decision to reopen the sports when they are aware of the risk it represents to schools and community. She indicated that she does not wish for any student to contract the virus and this is not the moment to risk hospital visits only because decisions are taken on ignorance and what is popular. She believes that the Board is putting the well-being of students at risk to only appease a few who are ignorant and to save their political futures. She urges the Board to plan for a safe process for all students to be back in the classroom, which should be the only priority.

Nick Salabaj, Coach, shared the following Facebook post from Vice President Montes, "I'm really sorry to our parents, students, and school sports trainers, but how can I support re-opening our schools today, when our community is still in Tier Purple, the highest at risk tier for COVID-19? How can I look people in the face and say, 'it's ok, go ahead and put your children at risk' when I currently have one of my own teenagers at home quarantined because he tested positive for COVID-19? As a father, I cannot support letting other parents put their children's health at risk while I have one of my own at home infected. I love my own children too much, and my decisions are based on if your children were my children." Mr. Salabaj indicated that he felt Mr. Montes was basing his decision not on science, but on personal emotion because he feels somewhat responsible for his son working out and training with his friend.

He indicated that the CDC has conclusive studies from both NFL and NCAA that show zero cases of transmission through both seasons, and that Dr. Chavez and Mr. Harris have done an amazing job as qualified, highly educated leaders in setting a path and qualifying the science-based risk, which is much more minimal than several misquoted citations and statements from the last meeting made by some board members. He also

shared that his sons and several of their friends are COVID recovered, and he has donated plasma to save lives of the elderly and those with underlying conditions that are dying mostly from Pneumonia which already had two vaccines to prevent these deaths.

Coach Salabaj also indicated that in regards to the comment made that no student is going to get a sports scholarship, his own son, a top 20 QB ranked in the State in Football and Wrestling has had his national rank drop due to no season, and had been projected as a D1 prospect with scouts. He indicated that the futures, education, and lively hoods of these students and their families are at risk, after they had a lifetime in pursuing their passions and goals. He recommend that the Board do the right thing and not treat students different because they live in the Rialto School District, as they have enough of that problem in our society.

Mr. Salabaj also shared that most athletes have stayed ready and in condition anticipating a start several times from CIF, and there have been plans of return, with severe safety measures, and protocols demonstrated by several athletic associations and highly qualified doctors and nurses, who have indicated that return to athletic training and competition is more vital than the continuing mental health issues being suffered by our Rialto athletes. He said that we are at the tail end of our decision making with now 3 weeks and no outbreaks have been reported by any of the 1000's of local schools. He believes that it is severely important we educate the children on COVID protocol as to not transmit to those at risk at home, but also for those athletes and their coaches who are willing to make the self-sacrifice to seize the opportunity to return to a less severe mental health normalcy. He also shared that there are families leaving our district, transferring to other schools, losing faith in District leadership, and therefore weakening the community. He said there should be no reason not to return, and feels that if we do not support the students and families to be responsible enough to make their own decisions, then that is a very elitist attitude to dictate as someone that is trying to lead through partnership. He recommends to allow parents and students to decide, as they are more qualified to know what is right for their family. He suggests that the Board not make haste in affording High School Seniors equitable access at an already late return to sports, as it will result in families protecting their rights and the rights of their children.

Nataly Gutierrez, Junior at Eisenhower High School, shared that she is part of the cross country, wrestling, and softball teams since her freshman year and she asked that the Board please take into consideration all the

effort, determination, and time that so many student athletes have put in the program to stay active and compete representing their schools and city. She said that she is the first example in her household, with 4 more siblings loving sports, as she does. She knows that demonstrating her determination means a lot to them because she shows them how important it is to stay active and set goals. Her brother, a freshman at Eisenhower, is excited to join any open sports at this point because staying active has help him, and the rest of them with their mental health.

D. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Moved By Member Walker

Seconded By Clerk Lewis

Vote by Board Members to adopt the agenda.

Approved by a Unanimous Vote

E. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

E.1 RESOLUTION NO. 20-21-25 TO RECONVENE CERTAIN OUTDOOR YOUTH SPORTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH GUIDANCE FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND CALIFORNIA INTERSCHOLASTIC FEDERATION

Moved By Member Walker

Seconded By Member O'Kelley

Prior to adoption of Resolution No. 20-21-25, the Board took action to amend the Resolution as follows:

AMENDMENT: That the proposed amendment to the Resolution be approved as is with the exception of the operational start date being scheduled for April 1, 2021 be extended to April 5, 2021, contingent on the School District, independently of the County, be in the red tier or lower.

Vote by Board Members.

President Martinez (Aye); Vice President Montes (No); Clerk Lewis (Aye);

Member O'Kelley (Aye); Member Walker (Aye)

Approved by a Majority Vote

Moved By Member O'Kelley

Seconded By Clerk Lewis

Adopt Resolution No. 20-21-25 **as amended** to reconvene certain outdoor youth sports in accordance with guidance from the California Department of Public Health and California Interscholastic Federation, allowing students to resume conditioning and subsequent competition.

Vote by Board Members.

President Martinez (Aye); Vice President Montes (No); Clerk Lewis (Aye);
Member O'Kelley (Aye); Member Walker (Aye)

Approved by a Majority Vote

F. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By Destiny Lopez, Student Board
Member

Seconded By Clerk Lewis

Vote by Board Members.

Time: 5:17 p.m.

Approved by a Unanimous Vote


Clerk, Board of Education


Secretary, Board of Education