

LUCAS COUNTY REGIONAL HEALTH DISTRICT
Board of Health Special Meeting
Meeting via Zoom
November 25, 2020 1:00 P.M.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Dr. Johnathon Ross, President, called the meeting to order at 1:09PM.

A roll call was taken of Board Members for attendance:

Present: Fritz Byers, Richard Fernandez, DPT, Matthew Heyrman, Ted Kaczorowski, Richard Munk, MD, Johnathon Ross, MD, Barbara Sarantou, Michelle Schultz, Donna Woodson, MD

Excused: Perlean Griffin, Donald Murray, Susan Postal

II. School Recommendation/Order Discussion

Purpose of the meeting is for a recommendation and order to close schools because of the overwhelming COVID-19 spread in the community.

Eric shared that the schools have done an amazing job. We have been working with them for months with their building plan, staff, quarantine and isolation plans. A couple months ago, when we started to see a climb in cases, the schools took it upon themselves to do many things to help stem the tide. The current situation we are in is not because of the schools. It is the nature of the disease and things we may not have done as a community, state or nation. Unfortunately it is a vector for the disease. There is a substantial concern for the students in the class specifically with the upcoming holidays as many will be going to visit family members. The real concern is that this will get much worse over the next few weeks. There is however, a silver lining. We do see a solution to the COVID concerns through vaccination. Vaccinations are still months away so we will still have to deal with COVID illness in the community and hospitals. We continue to see a rise in hospital usage here and across the state. Eric received a text from one of our local Lucas County hospital partners stating that a major hospital system in Cleveland sent out an immediate request for ventilators. That tells us that things are progressing to point of becoming dire for certain individuals. We understand the disease and who it affects but the fact is that people are going to seek medical resources. We are on short personnel and there are so many issues within the medical community and they are doing their best to provide medical services.

We need to take ownership and do something today. Eric's recommendation is to make this an order rather than a recommendation. There is research that children 11 and under have different responses than those 12 and above and into adulthood. We know from studies if we can get children to pause from school, there is the ability to combat the epidemic. We saw this in reports from China. This will then help the medical community and maybe save a few lives. We know we should keep kids in school, they perform better in school, however right now we are at 750 per 100,000 with 300 new cases a day. With the pop up testing last week we are seeing 20% positivity rate. This is well over the 15% the Governor said for the state. We need to be measured, we need to be deliberate and take the best possible action we can to make sure we are protecting the community and the hospitals and to understand that parents and children have needs.

With regards to the Ohio Revised Code we cannot pick and choose, we need to close all schools. We then can say what activities can be in the schools. K-6 would be in and 7 through 12 would be out. Teachers would be allowed in the building to do the virtual teaching. Special needs student need to be in the schools for the one on one instruction they require. This allows those who truly need to be present to be in school while we are getting the others out. Exam time is now, if you need the children in school for exams, you can do that. The

recommendation on the order is that the schools go virtual as soon as they can but no later than December 4, 2020 at 4:00 PM when the order is enacted. Why is that? Schools need some time to get this plan in place. Parents need to do some arranging of their schedules. Talking with some principals and superintendents they will probably not come back on Nov. 30th following Thanksgiving.

Dr. Ross stated that the Federal and State Governments have left it to us to decide what to do with schools. Up to now we have done our best to keep the younger kids in school for in-person learning and we do recognize the data suggests in-school spread is not the problem, especially in younger kids. We know there is some and likely more spread coming from the middle and high school aged kids. We know as the case counts go above 100 per 100,000 so does the risk for in-school spread. At times we have been at 500 per 100,000 which is five times the level where experts say there can be spread through the schools. Our positivity rate is also greater than 10%. We have been well above 10% and we are at a point where the experts say we will be seeing spread through the schools. If it were up to us we would be closing restaurants and bars in the state but that is up to the Governor. We are taking care of what we can as a board of health. The schools have done a great job with social distancing, hand hygiene and masks. However, they spend 2/3 of their time outside the school. Again, a key concern is we are on the verge of overwhelming our health care system. We have had our emergency responders, doctors and nurses putting their lives at risk out there for the past 8 months and will continue to do so for the next several months until the vaccine is available and the health care workers are vaccinated. It is up to us to do everything we can to help them so they are not overwhelmed. We are asking the schools to give the kids a virtual education only from the 7th grade up. If they can make the choice to keep the younger kids in school it isn't unreasonable, but this is what we are facing. An order to go to virtual December 4th is sensible from what we see

Dr. Ross stated that this order has his support and asked to hear from other Board Members. Eric stated the reason we asked this be done now rather than December 4th is that five to seven days after a large gathering where they are exposed, they could become infectious and come down with COVID. Talking with the schools, they do need some time to enact their plan. The reason we are going until January 11th is because of the Christmas and New Year holidays. We know we see a spike after holidays. It is only about 15 actual school days that we are asking the high school to go virtual.

We have been talking with the schools about sports activities and just don't want to focus on sports. The extracurricular activities are important too. We have had outbreaks from bands and other extracurricular groups. Some outbreaks have quarantined entire teams. We know by the nature of sports and some of these other activities the ability for the disease to spread within those groups is large so we really needed to look at these activities which are important to the kids. For some kids it is almost as important as their academics because of what they learn as an athlete or in those disciplines. Unfortunately with the current state and coming tide, we expect it would not be as beneficial to us if we would continue with sports the way they are. We know that the governor has looked at a couple different things.

Eric read the section of the order regarding sport activities. *"To limit COVID-19 spread among students, all youth sports are prohibited from utilizing any school building interior space for practice or contests during this same period."*

Dr. Ross stated the Governor has ultimate authority on this but at this point it is up to us to say there is enough community spread going on that we believe it is going to end up in the schools and that is going to re-ignite an even bigger fire back in the community. In the chat section of this call people are questioning if the universities are open. Other are saying that this is not our responsibility to make this decision with the schools about what we should do for the best interest of the community.

Dr. Fernandez, Matt Heyrman, Michelle Schultz, Ted Kaczorowski, Michelle Schultz, Fritz Byers, Dr. Monk, Barb Sarantou and Dr. Woodson shared much of the same concerns that children need to be in school, and concern for the parents who need to work and have to provide daycare for their children. These are hard decisions to make but this is in the best interest for the children and the overall health of the citizens of our community. Several shared that the Board of Health has struggled with making these decisions but know we are trying to do what is best for the community.

Ted Kaczorowski asked if there would be consideration for those who are wanting to give their comments. Dr. Ross referred to comments that were being submitted on the chat feature and people are weighing in. Many of these issues have been taken into consideration. Our responsibility is certainly to the kids and to understand we are creating, for some children, situations what will have a negative effect. We have to look at the entire community. For the older members of the community, this is a life or death situation. It is an educational and mental health issue for the kids. That is why we want the schools to keep the K – 6 grades in school if possible. Anything we can do to control the spread of COVID in our community we need to speak to it. This is an agonizing decision but it is our responsibility to use the best knowledge of public health science to say sorry, we wish we did not have more than 200 per 100,000 and wish we didn't have more than 10% positivity rate. Wish we did not have our hospitals on the edge of being overrun but that's where we are at. All of those things would show that we need to close schools according to the CDC.

Eric added even our best schools that are considered golden schools and are doing everything right really haven't had issues but are starting to see cases. This is understandable because of the amount of spread in the community. Eric also wanted to make sure that the board understands that the resolution they received yesterday has changed to include charter schools, so this includes all schools in the county. This includes public, private, charter and parochial schools. Staff involved in virtual learning can go into the buildings.

(Resolution 2020.11.190) A motion was made by Dr. Munk and seconded by Matt Heyrman to approve the School Recommendations as presented. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carried. 8 Yeas, 1 Nays

III. Adjournment

(Resolution 2020.11.191) A motion was made by Dr. Munk and seconded by Richard Fernandez to adjourn the meeting at 2:20 PM. Motion carried. 8 Yeas, 0 Nays (Dr. Munk was unable to unmute and vote)

Signed By:



Johnathon Ross, MD, President
Lucas County Regional Board of Health

Date

2/17/2020

Attested by:



Eric J. Zgodzinski, DrPH, MPH, RS, CPH
Secretary to the Board of Health

Date

12/17/20