

Joy Swearingen  
J-P correspondent

The Illinois State Board of Education acted quickly after Illini West High School board voted down requiring masks in the school.

- At their board meeting Aug. 18, Supt. Jay Harnack said he received an email, asking him to confirm that the district's plan is mask optional. He has responded that the plan in place, approved in July, recommended but did not require masks.
- Harnack then received a letter from Illinois State Board of Education placing Illini West on probation.
- "I do expect we will get a request to meet via zoom with ISBE. From the date of that meeting there is a 60-day timeline to describe how we would come back into compliance," Harnack said.
- "ISBE has 15 days to respond to the plan. What I would ask of the board is if we are going to send in a plan, that we do it in advance, and not on day 59, so we don't risk non-recognition."
- Board members indicated they would like to sit in on that zoom meeting. Harnack will ask ISBE if it can be scheduled in the evening and if board members can be present.
- Harnack also received a letter from the Macomb School District, saying, for athletic events on the schedule, if Illini West plays at Macomb, they will require athletes to be masked. If they come to play at Illini West they want to be assured that players and all fans at the game will be masked.
- Harnack asked for guidance on how to respond to requests from schools that requires masks.
- "Right now, we do not have any schools who are saying we won't come unless the entire gym is masked up," Harnack said. "We are playing at Macomb."
- He noted two choices. Illini West could notify fans that they would be required to mask up to come to the games, or the game is canceled as "no contest," not a forfeit. The school could schedule a different team to compete at that time.
- When asked, girls basketball coach, Grant Surprenant, said he would look at the choice from the point of the players.
- "I have some girls who are looking to play at college. Last year their season was shortened. If I was to ask them, I think they would want to play."
- John Huston asked if the district were to ask players and fans to mask for a game, would that be following the district policy.
- "If we follow our policy, we don't change. We follow the policy that is mask optional," said Huston.
- Harnack repeated that there are no conflicts with this issue at present, but he wanted to be prepared.
- During a time for public comment, Holly Wilde-Tillman expressed concern with ISBE probation and potential non-recognition in schools which do not require masks.
- "My concern is for the children, my daughter specifically," Wilde-Tillman said. "She is taking four college classes, four high school classes. She hopes to end her senior year with an associates degree. It is very important for these credits to count. I hope you will take that into account in the coming weeks as to whatever happens with the state so none of these kids' futures are jeopardized."

At the beginning of the meeting, a hearing was held for public comment on the district plan for use of ESSR II and III funds received by the district. This money must be used to address needs created by the pandemic, such as technical efforts to support remote learning, expenses for summer credit recovery

classes and after school tutors for learning loss, or additional buses to allow for social distancing. The full plan is available on the district website.

Superintendent Harnack and Principal Jim Short both praised staff and school families for a smooth start of classes, with good attendance at the Freshman Loop orientation and open house.

The board approved purchase of managed technology support services from K-12 ITC for an initial cost of \$49,550. The cost would lower in future years. IT director, Chris Greenhalge, supported the plan. New equipment including servers, cabling, phones, etc., could be installed during Thanksgiving break.

- Equipment is part of the contract, so any equipment failures are replaced by the vendor at no cost to the district. The annual cost for managed IT services is fixed and known. Replacing and supporting this equipment by the district can result in unbudgeted costs and services.

The board approved a request by Grant Surprenant for a one-night trip for the girls basketball team to attend the Summer Shootout at Missouri University in Columbia, Mo., in June 2022. They would use a white activity bus, and there would be no cost to the district.

After executive session the board approved the employment of Lexi Dooley as head softball coach and Rayleen Gunning as assistant volleyball coach. They accepted the resignation of Ashytn St. Clair-Miller as co-cheerleading sponsor.

The board approved renewal of membership in IHSA for fee of \$1250.

An updated principal evaluation framework was approved, to be in compliance with state requirements.

A budget hearing will be held at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 15, at the beginning of the regular board meeting to hear details and take public comment on the 2021-22 proposed budget.