

**GREENSBURG SALEM SCHOOL DISTRICT  
SPECIAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING OF OCTOBER 26, 2022**

**PRESENT:**

Mr. Brian Conway  
Miss Lynn Jobe  
Mrs. Emily Miller  
Mr. Jeff Metrosky  
Mr. Jon O'Brien  
Mrs. Robin Savage  
Mrs. Heather Shearer

**ABSENT:**

Mr. Frank Gazze  
Mr. Stephen Thomas

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS:**

Dr. Kenneth A. Bissell, Superintendent  
Mr. Lee Demosky, Solicitor

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Mrs. Allison Willis, School Board Secretary  
Mr. John Scales, Solicitor

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Mr. James Baker, Coordinator of Technology Integration & Student Information  
Mrs. Jennifer Kapusta, Hutchinson Elementary School Principal  
Mrs. Ashley Kertes, Associate Administrator to the Superintendent & Community Outreach  
Mr. Todd McMillen, Coordinator of Student Services  
Mr. David Redinger, Middle School Principal  
Mr. Matt Sofran, Greensburg Salem Education Association Representative  
Mr. David Zilli, High School Principal

**NEWS MEDIA**

No news media present.

Approximately ten (10) citizens of the community.

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Mr. Jeff Metrosky, School Board President, called the Meeting to Order at 6:07 P.M. Mrs. Ashley Kertes called the Roll, which is indicated above.

**VISITORS (SIGNED IN)**

Dr. Brandi Slider of 414 Ridgeway Street, Greensburg, addressed the Board on behalf of the organization, CORES. She inquired concerning the purpose and why the Board President

**VISITORS (SIGNED IN) CONT'D.**

Dr. Brandi Slider of 414 Ridgeway Street, Greensburg, addressed the Board on behalf of the organization, CORES. She inquired concerning the purpose and why the Board President scheduled the special meeting. Dr. Slider also inquired concerning the status of the service agreement discussed at the October 12, 2022 school board meeting and the hiring of an individual to address truancy issues.

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS**

Mr. Metrosky moved on to address agenda items 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 and opened them up for Board discussion.

**Mrs. Emily Miller:** I think these things were brought up as points of concern because following the meeting I looked at some of this in greater detail and I had some concerns not only about the 13.3 contract which seems to be somewhat circular - in the services it will provide aren't services, you know look at exhibit A and there's nothing in exhibit A, so the clarity in what services would be provided is lacking. Then for the 13.4 I looked in greater detail at the organization as well as the survey and I had some concerns about some of the language that was in there and some of the aims that it stated. I was one of the people that called for a meeting because I do not think that this is the right path for us to go and I think that we should have further discussion on it, particularly also because this was put on the voting meeting for us to vote on, not also the discussion meeting. So there was not a good opportunity for a discussion, for review, or anything like that prior to being expected to vote on it. Shall I continue with what concerns I have or open it up to others?

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** I think we can open it up to others or if you want to continue, let us know specifically the concerns that you are specifically addressing.

**Mrs. Emily Miller:** Ok, well I have already mentioned that in the service agreement the contract it doesn't really specify any services it just references the services that it would provide. Please check exhibit A and there is nothing there. And then looking also at the organization I guess looking at their page it says that we are called to work to eradicate systemic racism, particularly where it is embedded in our schools and institutions of learning and I do not think that that represents Greensburg Salem at all. I dislike and disagree that we have systemic racism embedded in our schools. So I disagree with that. Also, further on that I started looking into Communities in Schools and I have some concerns about it being so heavily funded by international level corporations including a tobacco company. It's funded in part by Altria, which used to be Phillips Morris. That is a concern to me as well and some of the other things that is in regards to where this is coming from that I do not think that we should have a partnership of any kind with this organization, particularly since just a few short years ago we participated in the truancy pilot project in the 2016-2017 school year and it says that this innovative project targets the root causes of truancy and developing solutions collaboratively. We were supposed to have developed a truancy elimination plan for the schools to utilize and I'm wondering what ever became of that and why did we not continue on with some of the organizations that were

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CONT'D**

suggested already by Westmoreland County itself, one of them being the National Center for School Engagement. So that's a start.

**Mr. Brian Conway:** So let's address this. What services are they providing? I did look at it and as Emily said, exhibit A is blank and that's where they define their services.

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** First I want to go back to the origins of this. We did work with Communities in Schools roughly 8 years ago and many years prior to that. The individual that was in our schools provided supports for families, they were essentially a truancy counselor to help provide supports for various reasons as to why any kid wouldn't be coming to school or struggle coming to school. Mr. Zilli has been asking for eight years with a budget of we need this again, we need this again. It's not necessarily Communities in Schools, it's the individual.

**Mr. Brian Conway:** Did we hire that person or did they hire that person?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** We do. We work with them to hire the person. Our administration will work with Communities in Schools to hire that individual. So we have teachers on staff now that started as this program with Communities in Schools working in the Greensburg Salem School District and then ended up becoming teachers of ours over time. When RK Mellon approached, they were looking to help truancy issues in Westmoreland County. RK Mellon wanted to give a shot in the arm with starting something, with their vision of eventually working with Westmoreland Community Action and the Community Foundation of Westmoreland County to provide additional truancy supports. All of the things from the truancy pilot program you mentioned are still in play. All of the truancy elimination plans - we have to develop truancy elimination plans for every child that reaches a certain number of days. Part of that is also time spent at a magistrate. Our administrators and Deans of Students spend a lot of time at magistrates working through some of these truancy elimination plans. The area that we are struggling with is having that person who can work with kids and families on a daily basis that's not going to the courthouse, that's not filing all the paperwork or sending letters to parents. This would be the person to provide the additional supports such as meeting with families and going to a child's house to try to get them to go to school. Mr. Zilli looked into Communities in Schools to find that person. The RK Mellon Foundation funded Communities in Schools to hire that person. That person would be under the direction of high school administration as to how they function the days they are working.

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** I have some issues with the survey written as it is. We can tweak it. We have Westmoreland County organizations that could do this work – but we are going to Allegheny County. We talked about having a truancy officer to help with the Dean of Students. We didn't have a discussion, we have an empty contract. Doing research on all of it, I think we should have had a little more of a discussion on what we're doing.

**Mrs. Heather Shearer:** What is the reason for going into Allegheny County if these are services Westmoreland County agencies can provide?

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CONT'D**

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** We don't have the services. The individual would probably be a local individual.

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** Why can't the district be involved in doing it and RK Mellon pays for that position? If RK Mellon is specifically telling us to use one group, I have a problem with that.

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** RK Mellon came with grant funding specific to Communities in Schools to support truancy. We were able to apply for the grant. In looking for who can provide supports for our children, that was an opportunity that administration said, "Are we going to hire the individual?" It wasn't something that we were ready to budget for, it was a way to get someone to help our children who struggle with truancy. Right now 27% of our high school kids – over 200 kids - have truancy issues. So we are trying to find ways to provide supports for our children. We have a great relationship with RK Mellon. I've worked with RK Mellon, our administrators have, we have trust there. Their goal isn't to get two years at GS, its we need to find better structures and supports in Westmoreland County to provide supports that are in Allegheny County. Their goal is to get more supports in Westmoreland County. These discussions were had in April when we were talking about this opportunity.

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** Dr. Bissell, the sample questionnaire that was attached, that's just a sample? The questionnaire that will eventually be formulated will be different. Will that questionnaire come before the Board for discussion and approval?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** Yes. It's school climate data. For our PCCD school climate surveys fall under tier I, so you can't move to tier II solutions of funding without it. Communities in Schools will work with us to interpret some of the data as to how we work with that and what that means for what the individual might be working with. We have to have school climate surveys for many different things, PCCD Safety grants suggests you use school climate data. This is an opportunity to work with people who develop school climate surveys to help us create ours.

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** Some of the things on that questionnaire were concerning – leading answers, not yes or no. After I got through the first section I had a really hard time.

**Mr. David Zilli:** This is a model that has been really successful. One of our teachers was a Communities in Schools person. They were performing Greensburg Salem duties, though they were funded by Communities in Schools. They were really meeting the needs between administration and high school guidance. Our need didn't drop – I brought in over 50 students from across the United States with dynamic family backgrounds. It's not the typical Greensburg family from the 1950's. We're talking about a wider range of needs. These students and families don't know where resources are. We have so many people in our community who don't have that extra support, that person who can help with coaching with homework. People who did it were that stop gap between guidance, because guidance is overwhelmed. It's really another set of hands on deck that can do a lot of different things. With truancy and getting students to school, we have an automated system, but sometimes it's making that second and third phone call to say, "Hey, they aren't here for a second day, is it ok if I go to the house and pick them

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CONT'D**

up?" I'd like to tell you that our automated system is working, but it's an automated system. We don't always know who is getting those calls. This can result in failure, which can result in dropouts. I think we're trying to frontload a program that's run and really backed by us. I was able to work with a young lady with a mental health background and she was from Communities in Schools. She worked between us and Jeannette School District and was able to support our district in that way. I've been here a long time – this is about having more hands on deck. I think we can all support more hands on deck. We don't have the funding but if someone is willing to give it to us I'd say it's a no brainer. It's benefited us in the past and I feel very confident that we can make it work again.

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** So although we are using Communities in Schools as a conduit to get this project going and funded, we have full control over how we manage it? We are not mandated or obligated to follow anything Communities in Schools directs us to?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** No. We manage the individual at our school as far as what they are going to do at the school with the kids.

**Mr. David Zilli:** We met with them a few weeks ago. The needs that we had, they agreed that they would be able to meet those needs. It's about what we need to meet the needs of Greensburg Salem students, not the needs of students in Allegheny County. My experience has been nothing but positive.

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** If this is about my communications about this stuff, I'll take that. I'm not perfect, I'll take it if it was felt that I didn't do a good job communicating. What I hope we don't do is when we have someone like RK Mellon reaching out to us as Greensburg Salem, because of the relationships and trust we've built with them, they say ok we trust that you are going to move forward with this and make something happen, because we want to help Westmoreland County the way we are able to help Allegheny County. And so when they reach out to us and say here's an opportunity, and our administrators have been asking for this for eight years. Now we are working with RK Mellon on other opportunities right now to help our kids with college in high school credits and then piggybacking that off of working with GSEF to make it sustainable. I would hate to throw away partnerships that we've built over time.

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** I don't think we are saying anything about partnerships. I think what most of us have questions about is that there was no discussion. And had we had this conversation at the discussion meeting and more clarity was brought forward, this meeting would have never happened.

**Ms. Lynn Jobe:** Ken just took full responsibility for that. To punish our kids for that is ridiculous. We are stopping progress.

**Mrs. Heather Shearer:** If truancy is an issue...

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CONT'D**

**Ms. Lynn Jobe:** Then we need to do something about it and difficulty in communication with Ken should be brought forth openly with Ken, not in a forum like this.

**Mrs. Emily Miller:** It's not just that it came late. There are things with this organization that are concerning. I'm concerned about the corporatization of education. That's a huge problem. No Child Left Behind had corporate backing. Common Core had corporate backing. This has more had corporate backing. All standardized tests have a lot of corporate backing. I'm gravely concerned about what that's doing to teaching. Have we explored the National Center for School Engagement which was recommended on the Westmoreland County website?

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** Although the funding has corporate backing, it was made clear that we have control of the program.

**Mr. Brian Conway:** So are we voting on these three items tonight?

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** No, they already passed. If there is a consensus of five votes to rescind it somebody has to make a motion and a second.

**Mr. Brian Conway:** So for item 2.2 I want to make sure it's clear – we'll approve the survey before it goes out.

**Mr. Jon O'Brien:** Ken, you can opt out of it if you don't want to do it, right? You're not forced to do it?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** Nobody is forced to take any survey.

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** That needs to be made clear because many parents don't realize they have that option.

**Mrs. Emily Miller:** I guess I also have questions about taking more school time away to do these surveys. Looking at some of the options as well as the PASS survey that we already do, there seems that there is some overlap. Isn't the PASS survey to some extent a school climate survey?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** No, the PASS is a screener. It's based on the individual child. That is a screener that our counselors use.

**Mrs. Emily Miller:** Is that a universal screener?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** It is a universal screener for each child. A school climate survey is asking them to reflect not about themselves, it's asking them to reflect on the school itself. It's broad. It's with students, parents, community and doesn't have to be during school time. It can be put out for students to take on their own time. We have time set aside during the school day where we can talk to kids about "How is school for you? What works? What doesn't work? How can we change?" We have control over what that would look like and we would present it then.

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** Is this something they can take at home with their parent instead of during the day?

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS – SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CONT'D**

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** They could because we're not going to bring parents into the school to take it. I don't want to cross lines over what is administrative. I trust the administrators who get the information from the kids when it's best.

**Mr. David Zilli:** Using this survey to get accurate information is going to allow us to align our programs, services, and people. We'll use the survey to find "Where's the greatest need and how can we best manage it?" We survey students a lot and they are very comfortable giving us feedback. I don't think the survey is meant to be extensive. We use our Wednesdays as flexible time – we can get it done in one 30-minute session.

**Mr. Brian Conway:** So are we having any votes on these?

*A motion was made by Emily Miller to rescind item 13.3.*

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** There is a motion. Is there a second?

*No second motion was made. 2.1 stands. Motion failed.*

**Mrs. Robin Savage:** So the Board will review any survey before it goes out?

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** When we're even ready.

**Mr. Brian Conway:** So we don't need to change 2.2 then to say we have to approve the survey?

**Mr. Lee Demosky, Solicitor:** We'll put it on the next agenda meeting for discussion and put it for a vote if you need to amend it.

**Dr. Ken Bissell:** It might not be until December when we have the final survey.

**Mr. Jeff Metrosky:** If there's nothing else, I'd like to invite Mr. Grace to come speak.

**GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Greensburg Salem resident and parent Mr. Desmond Grace of 615 Helen Avenue, Greensburg addressed the Board, stating that it's very concerning that there was a motion that was made at the last meeting when the board claimed they didn't have enough information to approve the agenda items. Mr. Grace also expressed his concerns of systemic racism. CORES members in attendance joined the conversation, including Dr. Brandi Slider and Ms. Julie Greathouse.

Greensburg Salem resident and parent, Mr. Justin Aion of 837 Cribbs Street, Greensburg also expressed his concerns regarding the Board approving agenda items on which they didn't have enough information.

Ms. Julie Greathouse of 528 Hampton Street, Greensburg expressed her concerns about the RK Mellon Foundation not funding the district in the future. She also questioned whether the district advertised the evening's meeting in the local newspaper.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion was made by Conway/Savage** to adjourn the meeting.

*Section 508 vote: All seven Board Members present voted in the affirmative.*

The Special School Board Meeting of the Greensburg Salem School District Board of Education held on Wednesday, October 26, 2022, beginning at 6:07 P.M. at the Middle School in Room 003 was adjourned at 7:17 P.M.

ATTEST:

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Allison Willis, School Board Secretary