



**Board Work Session Minutes
Monday, September 25, 2023**

The Board of Directors held a Work Session on Monday, September 25, 2023. The meeting began at 6 pm and was held at District Office. Directors Denholm, Burchard, Olson, Cannon and Gray were present. Also attending were Superintendent Travis Hanson and Chief Financial Officer Heather Ellingson.

I. Approval of Agenda

Director Cannon made a motion to approve the agenda, as amended (an update on the WSSDA General Assembly attended by President Denholm and Director Cannon was added). Director Olson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

II. WSSDA General Assembly Update

The WSSDA General Assembly, where a variety of positions and statements are voted on, took place September 22-23, 2023. Both Director Cannon and President Denholm attended the event representing the Mead School District Board of Directors. Director Cannon noted that 48 policy positions were considered.

Of particular note was the proposed change to the WSSDA bylaws that would move the organization away from a weighted voting system that gives more decision making power to larger school districts, to a system where each district has a single vote. Based on enrollment Mead, in the current system, might have five votes with Spokane having eleven. This amendment to the bylaws eventually passed, although the voting process was lengthy.

Director Cannon reported important position statements regarding a variety of topics including school funding were agreed upon and will be shared with state legislators. He additionally noted WSSDA is paying attention to things like suicide prevention, mental health and drug use prevention.

III. Enrollment Update

Chief Financial Officer Heather Ellingson reported September 8th K-12 enrollment is down approximately 300 FTE from last year at this time. This is an unexpected/unanticipated decline. Kindergarten enrollment is particularly low/alarming. It currently sits at 74 below budget. ALE enrollment is slightly better than last year resulting in a net decline in overall FTE from last year to this year of 258. Ms. Ellingson is hopeful October enrollment will see some increases. In preparing the 23/24 budget the district assumed flat enrollment. While Running Start numbers are not included until October, those numbers won't have a major impact on budget as Running Start is primarily a "money-in, money-out" program.

Preliminary analysis of the enrollment decline shows students moving out of the district. In the next 90-120 days the situation will be researched in more detail to determine if this is a one year anomaly or a new trend. Declining enrollment is not unique to the Mead School District. With the exception of Deer Park other area school districts are also experiencing these same enrollment challenges.

The biggest enrollment losses were at Highland Middle School, Mead High School and the kindergarten classes at Prairie View, Skyline and Midway. The financial impact of this lower than budgeted for enrollment is approximately \$3.6 million.

In planning for next year and beyond things that will be considered include:

- The impact and enrollment challenges associated with the growing number of apartment complexes being built in the district.
- Ways to enhance efficiencies in the Mead Learning Options programs.
- Planning for declining rather than flat enrollment when preparing the budget.
- If enrollment does not rebound and continues to decline the possibility of doing a boundary adjustment and repurposing an elementary school.

Noting the top priority in the short term is passing the replacement EP&O Levy, Superintendent Hanson assured that starting in the winter and moving into spring there will be emphasis placed on “right sizing” in preparation for the 24/25 school year.

IV. Levy Update/Election Resolution Discussion

The upcoming issue of *Mead Matters* will be in homes near the end of September. This issue includes information on the upcoming replacement levy and invites patrons to visit the district’s website for more information. Additionally, there is a QR code that, when scanned, takes community members to a quick *ThoughtExchange* survey where they can share what information would be helpful to them as they consider the replacement levy ballot measure.

The district’s current levy rate is \$1.64 and the current bond rate is \$1.35. Assuming a target levy rate of \$2.50, and a reduced bond rate of \$1.09, the net increase in the total Mead School District tax rate would be \$.60. Noting that when talking about levies and bonds the conversation often centers around a rate per \$1,000 of assessed value, Superintendent Hanson reminded that voters approve a set dollar amount not a rate and the maximum amount that can be collected is that dollar amount no matter how much assessed valuations may increase or decrease. For the upcoming three-year replacement levy a 4% growth rate from one year to the next seems reasonable to Ms. Ellingson. While the past couple of years have been anomalies, historically projected tax rates have been in line with approved levy dollar amounts.

Additional discussion included the following:

- The need to share where levy dollars are spent and, in particular, share what the extra levy monies will be used for.
- Quantify/show the value of how the levy enhances/sustains the *Mead Experience*.

Superintendent Hanson shared information on the ballot measures other school districts anticipate running in February. While Mead only plans to run a replacement levy, many others plan to not only run a replacement levy but also a capital levy and/or bond measure. Mead’s target rate of a \$2.50 is in line with, or less than, the total amount being requested by many districts.

Concern was expressed regarding a \$2.50 ask given current economic conditions. Additionally, the possibility of doing a smaller levy combined with a capital levy was brought forward. Ms. Ellingson expressed concern regarding two ballot measures noting, in particular, the possibility of the capital levy being approved and the more critical replacement levy not passing. She reminded the district has, for the past few years, been accessing \$3-\$5 million from fund balance each year to meet obligations. District savings will soon be depleted. A rate less than \$2.50 will not allow the district to expand any program, enhance safety and security or add any mental health services. It was noted the district has not had success with capital/technology levies and that more than one ballot measure has the potential of confusing voters.

V. Board Protocols/Operating Principles Ongoing Discussion

Discussion on board protocols/operating principles was postponed and will be discussed at an upcoming Work Session.

VI. Policy Audit Discussion

As requested at the July 27, 2023 Board Work Session, the district conducted an audit of current policies including when each policy was last updated and, based on WSSDA's rating system, a notation of whether the policy is *Essential*, *Encouraged* or *Discretionary*. The audit additionally included a list of WSSDA policies the board has not adopted.

In sharing audit results Superintendent Hanson reported there are a substantial number of *Essential* policies (86) in need of updating and/or adoption. Whether a broad scale, or a more methodical 5-6 policies at a time approach is utilized, the updating process will involve considerable work. Discussion centered on how to most efficiently/effectively accomplish the policy updating task. It was noted that WSSDA sample policies are used as templates for adoptions and revisions as they have been legally vetted to comply with current state law.

Director Gray shared she is hesitant to do any blanket approval of WSSDA policies. To be in a position to approve presented revisions and/or adoptions at a second reading, President Denholm noted the importance of the board doing their homework in advance.

VII. High School Reports at Board Meetings Discussion

It has been the board's practice to invite members of the ASB class at Mead High School and Mt. Spokane High School to present an update on school activities/athletics at board meetings on a rotating basis. Now that the board has transitioned to only one business meeting each month Superintendent Hanson asked for feedback on whether the board would like to continue the alternating schedule or have both schools report at each business meeting. Following brief discussion, all board members were in favor of inviting both schools to present at each business meeting.

VIII. Superintendent Update

Superintendent Hanson provided a brief update on the following topics:

- **October 6th Learning Improvement Day** - Ken Williams (via Zoom) will be the guest speaker for the day. To provide a glimpse into topics that may be covered Superintendent Hanson showed a couple of short YouTube video segments featuring Mr. Williams. The training provided on October 6th will meet the state's DEI requirement.
- **Morning Coffee & Lunch Time Conversations** - Several opportunities for the community to meet with Superintendent Hanson for morning coffee or lunch time conversations have been established. Initially six events were scheduled. They filled up so quickly more will now be added. The same questions asked at the July *Community Forum* will be asked again in these smaller gatherings.
- **Halloween Celebrations** - Noting some elementary schools have Halloween celebrations and others do not, and sharing school principals are wanting uniformity on whether to host or not host, Superintendent Hanson asked the board if they have a strong opinion one way or another. Food issues, religious differences and the cost of purchasing costumes, as well as the ways schools who have Halloween celebrations work to mitigate concerns in these areas, were discussed. Board members indicated their support for allowing Halloween celebrations at all elementary schools.
- **Copy Center Staff Reduction** - Presented as an FYI, Superintendent Hanson shared the negative impact the reduction of the swing-shift Copy Center employee is having at all school locations. The reduction has resulted in more usage of the more expensive building pod copiers. The district is currently considering the pros and cons of adding the position back.
- **Levy Advocacy Committee** - Superintendent Hanson briefly referenced a PDC complaint made against the Mead Citizens Advisory Committee (independent campaign advocacy group) dating back to earlier levy campaigns. The committee has responded to the complaint and is now awaiting a response.

The board thanked Superintendent Hanson for the update. Director Burchard noted it has been an excellent start to the school year.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8 pm.

President

Secretary