

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Regular Meeting September, 2021 Lincoln/Virtual

PRESENT: Heinrich, Hughes, Pattacini, Stefanovicz, Thames

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent Curriculum & Special Services Radikas, Assistant Superintendent Clancy, Assistant Superintendent Sone-Moyano

ABSENT: Luna, Meggers, Patterson

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

Chairperson Thames called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Thames.

A.3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of August 30, 2021. Secretary Pattacini moved and Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the motion.

4/0/1 – Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mr. Geary presented eight items on the Consent Calendar for Board approval.

C.1. Personnel Action

Details had already been provided to the Board members with their agenda.

C.2. Transfer of Funds

- Transfer from Bennet Academy Mathematics Instructional Supplies and Materials account in the amount of \$534.00 and transfer from Bennet Academy School Administration General Supplies and Materials account in the amount of \$180.00 to Bennet Academy Mathematics Dues and Fees account in the total amount of \$714.00

C.3. Permission to apply for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Secondary Basic Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$119,485.00

C.4. Permission to apply for the Alliance District Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$9,133,576

C.5. Permission to apply for the Priority School District Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$829,424

C.6. Permission to apply for the Priority School District Extended School Hours Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$131,566

C.7. Permission to apply for the Priority School District Summer School Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$153,450

C.8. Establish an appropriation for the RISE Innovation Grant for the FY 21/22 in the amount of \$246,000

The Chairman called for a motion.

Secretary Pattacini moved and Mr. Heinrich seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar as outlined in this evening's agenda.

5/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

None.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Thames reviewed the rules of engagement for public speakers. He noted that speakers should not expect an immediate response, though at the Chair's discretion it is possible. Written comments are also acceptable. Mr. Thames noted that this is not the forum for personnel or legal issues and asked speakers to refrain from derogatory and profane language.

Sheralyn Lazu, 22 Oak Grove Street, noted her family has been in town for decades, from her grandparents in the 60's. Her family loves this town and they bought their first home in our community. She has three children, ages 7, 4 and 2. Ms. Lazu wants to be clear, she cares deeply about this town, their values and commitment to equity.

Ms. Lazu, as a member of the Highland Park PTA, has met with PTA members at Martin, Bowers and Buckley to connect and plan events. She is upset about the loss of dedicated classroom space for music and art. Ms. Lazu feels the board members are not listening to or connecting with residents enough. She feels the board members do care and want to make a difference, but they need to make time and work together with the school communities. She feels the Board can be the bridge to a better Manchester.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, noted it is almost the 245th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He recommended books about George Washington and the Salem Witch Trials. Mr. Stringfellow noted the approaching 80th anniversary of Pearl Harbor and the end of the Spanish Civil War. He touched on the invasion of Ethiopia, war crimes, the war on terror, and the importance of masks and vaccinations. He hopes history will be taught in a balanced way.

F. Superintendent's Report

F.1. Update on Buckley and Bowers Projects

Mr. Geary noted that a motion is required for the Buckley Project later this evening and introduced Randall Luther from TSKP Studio to update us on the two projects.

Mr. Luther briefly touched on the Photovoltaic (PV) documents for Buckley that will be voted on under new business this evening. He explained they underwent a study to determine the optimal direction to face the panels, which is usually south, but sometimes west for the late afternoon sun. Ultimately the panels will be south facing as there was no major difference in how much electricity would be generated. There will be 950 PV panels on the roof of Buckley that will generate as much energy as the school uses over the course of a year. At some points there will be more energy produced, and at some points less, but overall it should offset the electricity use over the year. The current cost estimate from O&G Industries is \$1.1m which is higher than thought pre-Covid. It is hard to get a handle on bid prices today and the hope is that they come down more.

Mr. Luther showed the color scheme for Buckley and the two grand staircases. The staircases will be vibrant colors while the rest of the building will be more neutral to highlight these areas and celebrate the vertical circulation. The inspiration for this theme was Piet Mondrian and his composition with red, blue and yellow.

Mr. Thames felt this would be an exciting place to learn and grow.

Next, Mr. Luther moved on to the plans for Bowers. Currently the front door for Bowers is not easily accessible from the parking lot on the side of the building. In years past it was most common for parents and students to walk to the school, so that was not an issue, but today most people drive and it is difficult to have the elevator and staff entrance in the lower level and the office on the upper level. Also the parking area only has 50 spots currently, which is not even enough to support the staff. There will be two new parking areas with a total of 150 spaces. On the Princeton side of the building, where the front entrance is located, there will be a small lot for some staff and visitors, as well as a bus loop. On the side/rear of the building, to the left of the current parking lot and surrounding the ball field, will be a larger parking area. This rear lot will be where parents park to pick up or drop off their students and sidewalks will be adjacent to all spots. Staff will also use this back lot and the two entrances will be connected through the main hall. The area that currently contains the parking area will be made into a courtyard, which will be off the cafeteria and near the STEM area. This will be a magical educational opportunity with

amphitheater seating and will easily accommodate two classes at a time. There will also be two fenced play areas for the upper and lower grades. The recently built playground, funded by the PTA, will be saved as will many of the mature trees that are on the property.

Mr. Luther reviewed the weird level changes currently in the building. Not all areas are easily accessible by wheelchair users currently. That will be rectified. In the gym a retractable stage will be installed so that when not in use a larger gym area which can accommodate two teaching spaces will be utilized.

Weathered copper will be used on the addition to promote the natural feel and will also be carried throughout the entry canopies and roof.

Ms. Stefanovicz loves the classic meets natural feel on the outside. She wondered how deliveries will be made to the kitchen, which is being moved to the opposite side of the parking area. Mr. Luther pointed out a small paved area near the courtyard that is near the main hall leading to the kitchen. This will be used for deliveries as well as for access to the dumpsters.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if the parking lots would accommodate two way traffic. Mr. Luther indicated they would and also explained that they are required to accommodate large fire trucks, so although the drawing looks small, there will be plenty of room.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if Bowers will also be a net zero building. Mr. Luther stated that is the intent. When the directors added money to the referendum the goal was to "get close to net zero", but now that they have been able to plan for net zero at Buckley the new desire is to achieve net zero everywhere.

Ms. Stefanovicz asked Mr. Geary if we could provide a survey to parents, staff and teachers of currently remodeled buildings to gather ideas for the next build. What do they love, dislike, etc. Mr. Geary noted we can do that, but that is not always the best way to get ideas. Mr. Luther also added that at some point in each project they do make a presentation to a group of parents and teachers and come away with new ideas. Each renovation in Manchester gets closer to the ideal as the team learns more about how Manchester teaches children.

Mr. Thames asked about the rear entrance and Mr. Luther explained that parents will park in the lot and students will be dismissed from that rear door, so that the cars are not lining Princeton Street as the neighbors complain about that.

F.2. Update on Opening of Schools

Mr. Geary reviewed that the goal has been to have smaller classes this year, both to increase academic attention and to provide for 3 feet social distancing whenever possible. Most elementary classes are 16-18 with a few 18-19. At Bennet most classes are about 18 students.

Mr. Geary announced that the MHS student population will top 1700 students for the first time in ten years!

He reviewed there have been some staffing challenges this year, with some late hires that need to give notice to their current employers so they are not in district yet and subs are being utilized. There will be a non-certified job fair soon. Food service staff were given \$1,000 retention bonuses for all their hard work the last 18 months.

Regarding Covid, the first week of school we had 5 cases and today alone there were 10 cases. There have been a mix of student and staff cases, primarily unvaccinated. School personnel will need to be vaccinated or submit to weekly testing, so Mr. Geary is hoping this will encourage more vaccinated staff which will hopefully drive the number of cases down.

As we heard previously, the legislation did not allow for remote learning this year unless a student is in quarantine. There are about 14 medically fragile children that need some remote programming. We will continue with all mitigation strategies.

Mr. Geary reviewed there were 5 days of professional development for staff before school began. He showed pictures of the new gym floor at MHS. Even behind the masks, you can see the enthusiasm of the kids as they returned to school.

New Student Engagement Specialists at the elementary level are off and running. They are reaching out to families and building relationships as they reach out to those with early absences.

Mr. Pattacini wondered about the possibility of in-school spread with so many cases at Bowers. Mr. Geary believes all those cases were individually traced to outside of school, though they are watching.

Mr. Pattacini wondered at what point the state might direct us to go remote. Mr. Geary stated that was done due to staffing shortages in the past, but there is no current plan for that now. It was noted that Hebron recently went remote for a week due to coverage issues. So far, we have had plenty of subs this year, so that has not been an issue. Also, vaccinated staff do not need to be quarantined without symptoms, so that results in less of a staffing issue. We are currently collecting vaccination records of staff, which only the school nurses and Marney Reardon will be able to see.

Ms. Stefanovicz thanked Mr. Geary for his consistent, prompt communication around Covid. This has built trust.

Regarding the number of students at Bennet (422 in 5th and 412 in 6th) it seems we are bursting at the seams. Mr. Geary stated that in a "normal" year when we could place 20-23 students in a class that would be fine, but with trying to keep class sizes smaller it has been an issue. Two new classrooms were built in the library at Bennet and the weight room was also repurposed into classroom space.

Mr. Thames was at Highland Park for the first day of school this year and he felt they did a great job. The staff were prepared and helpful and there was a warm feeling. Mr. Thames wondered if we are still using desk shields K-4. Mr. Geary noted that grades K-8 are primarily using desk shields when they eat and the jury is still out on how helpful they are.

Mr. Thames wondered about plans for more on-site vaccination clinics. Mr. Geary stated that as they expand eligible ages for vaccines another clinic will be held. Because the students would be younger and parents would most likely want to be present, the thought is that this would run on a Saturday morning.

Mr. Geary noted that each school has about 50 rapid tests for use on people who are not feeling well. There has been talk about testing students weekly, but he is not sure of the value of that and he is in constant contact with the state.

Mr. Thames welcomed the students back to Manchester Public Schools and hopes a new normal is evolving. He thanked parents for their patience and communication with the schools. It takes a partnership to make the school year flow. Mr. Thames also shouted out to the SROs.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

H. NEW BUSINESS

H.1. Review and Approval of the Photovoltaic Bid Documents for Buckley Elementary School

Secretary Pattacini moved that the Manchester Board of Education certify that the final plans and project manual(s) as prepared for bidding and dated 23 August 2021 and the professional cost estimate, completed in accordance with Level 3 of ASTM International Standard E1557, Standard Classification of Building Elements and Related Sitework-UNIFORMAT II for this project, dated 07 September 2021, have been reviewed and approved for this project. Mr. Heinrich seconded the motion.

5/0 - Voted in favor.

H.2. Ratification of the Manchester School Administrators Contract

Secretary Pattacini moved for the Board of Education to approve the Manchester School Administrators Contract, covering the period of July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2026. Ms. Patterson seconded the motion.

5/0 - Voted in favor.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS (Limited to items on tonight's agenda)

Mr. Thames again reviewed the rules for public speakers.

Sheralyn Lazu, 22 Oak Grove Street, asked what quarantine learning looks like. She wondered if students would have different teachers or if work would be sent home.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, gave his approval to all items on the Consent Calendar. He enjoyed the presentation by Randall Luther. Mr. Stringfellow pointed out an article in the fall *Better Manchester* about the solar panels at Buckley. Mr. Stringfellow heard Nancy Pelosi speak last week in East Hartford. He recommended articles in several newspapers about back to school tips, evictions, and online hate.

J. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Monday, September 27, 2021 - Update on Technology

Thursday, October 14, 2021 - Bowers Update

Monday, November 8, 2021- Update on Human Resources/Reaffirmation of Board of Education Bylaws

L. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Thames called for a motion to adjourn.

Secretary Pattacini moved and Ms. Patterson seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

5/0 - Voted in favor.

Adjournment 8:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Pattacini
Board Secretary