

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Regular Meeting
January 10, 2022
Lincoln/Virtual**

PRESENT: Eisenthal, Kohls, Mix, Ntem-mensah, Orsene, Patterson, Stefanovicz

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent Curriculum & Special Services Radikas, Director of Finance & Management Clancy, Director of Human Resources Sone-Moyano

ABSENT: Meggers, Pattacini, Thames

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

Acting Chairperson Patterson called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Ms. Patterson.

A.3. Action to fill Board Member Vacancy

Acting Chairperson Patterson reminded the room that Mr. Thames had resigned his position on the Board in order to assume his new position as Town Clerk of Manchester. She thanked Mr. Thames for his many years of service and wished him well in his new position. This evening we are looking for a nomination for Mr. Thames replacement on the Board.

Ms. Mix stated it was her honor to nominate Kwasi Ntem-Mensah to the Manchester Board of Education. Mr. Orsene seconded the nomination.

6/0 - Voted in favor.

A.4. Oath of Office for New Board Member

Manchester Town Clerk Darryl Thames stepped forward to swear in Mr. Ntem-Mensah as his successor on the Board of Education.

A.5. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of December 6, 2021. Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved and Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion.

7/0 – Voted in favor.

A.6. Building and Sites Minutes - December 6, 2021

Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved to move item A.6. Building and Sites Minutes - December 6, 2021 to B.1. Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion.

7/0 - Voted in favor.

A.7. Board of Education Special Meeting Minutes - December 20, 2021

APPROVED – Minutes Special Meeting of the Board of Education of December 20, 2021. Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved and Ms. Mix seconded the motion.

7/0 – Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

B.1. Buildings & Sites Committee

Ms. Stefanovicz reported the last Building & Sites Committee meeting was held December 6, 2021. Committee Members in attendance were: David Eisenthal, Richard Kohls, Michael Orsene and Melanie Stefanovicz. Other attendees were: Matthew Geary, Superintendent of Schools; Karen Clancy, Assistant

Superintendent of Finance & Management and Lindsey Boutilier, Director of Operations & Athletics.

The Alliance Construction Grant Projects was discussed and the Committee was updated as to the status of the projects completed through the Alliance Construction Grant. Projects focused on Manchester High School and Illing Middle School.

The MHS pool roof grant application will be submitted to the State in the next month or so. The work will take place in the Spring 2021. Most other school roof replacements have been addressed or will be addressed through school construction projects. All school roofs have been inspected and repairs were made and will continue to be addressed as necessary. Illing Middle School will need to be considered for replacement in the not too distant future.

The MHS gym floor has been replaced. The work is complete and we are very pleased with the final product.

Permits for the portable unit for Central Office have been approved and received. Electrical work will be scheduled this month and the unit will be installed mid to end of January.

We are looking to move The Welcome Center out of 555 Main Street. The firehouse located on the Cheney-Bennet campus was a consideration but has been determined as cost prohibitive. We will continue to look for options.

The Town-initiated Energy Efficiency Upgrade and Solar Panel projects are underway. We will continue to update the Board as to the status.

A new Maintenance Technician Supervisor position has been created for the Buildings & Grounds department for accountability and oversight of the trades work in the district. Lead Maintainer roles have also been created for each of the trades which will provide additional oversight.

Additional classroom space has been created at Highland Park Elementary School and Bennet Academy, based on school needs. Additional classroom space is in the process of being created within Iling Middle School.

We have a shared responsibilities agreement in place with the Town for maintenance and custodial services of Washington while Manchester Middle Academy is housed there.

Verplanck Elementary School has experienced a number of water intrusion issues. We are working with TSKP and a contractor to address the issues.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mr. Geary presented two 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 System-wide Plant Maintenance Capital Repairs account to System-wide Plant Maintenance Capital Projects account in the amount of \$79,076.00.

The Acting Chairperson called for a motion.

Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved and Mr. Eisenthal seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar as outlined in C.1. and C.2.

7/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Leila Affini hoped everyone was able to stay safe during last week's weather events. She reported that Manchester High School is back from Winter break and enjoyed a surprise four-day weekend to start the week. The second quarter is coming to a fast close on January 21.

Sports, including the indoor track teams, the boys swim team, hockey and basketball teams are in the middle of their seasons.

As we all know, we are in the midst of a slight uptick in COVID cases. Students at the high school who have been exposed to COVID-19 are still able to be present during in-classroom meetings through the use of google meets.

Seniors are continuing to prepare for college. Last week the MHS Counseling Department hosted a virtual Red Hawk Return where recent school alumni came to speak about their college experiences and offer advice.

A google form has been sent out to all seniors about the yearbook. Students will be able to pick out their senior quote and superlatives as well as add a baby picture. These submissions are due by January 28.

Finally, Ms. Affini noted there is a new course being offered at the high school called 'Continuing Education'. It is open to any juniors or seniors interested in working in the education field.

E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Acting Chairperson Patterson reviewed the guidelines for public participation.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, wished everyone a Happy 2022! He reminded us that Dr. King's Day is next week, January 17th. Mr. Stringfellow informed us that it was 38 years ago that President Reagan signed the day into law and Connecticut was the first state to recognize it as a holiday. Mr. Stringfellow stated he does not want to see another January 6, 2021. We can do better. Black people are suffering now. Mr. Stringfellow mentioned several articles, including items on COVID, vaccine boosters, children's vs parent's rights regarding vaccines, as well as a book on Asian-Americans. With the budget meetings starting soon, he also recommended a book about ill-funded, discriminatory education, *Schoolhouse Burning*.

Mr. Colin McNamara, 47 Grandview Street, noted it is a tumultuous time in public education. The last couple of years have endured a lot of quick changes. Though Mr. McNamara noted he homeschools his own children, he wondered about the Federal funding (America Cares, Rescue Plan, ESSER Program I, II, and III - Survive, Thrive,

Transform). He notes \$1,709,401,391 has been received by the State of Connecticut for education. He feels the Department of Public Education website is hard to navigate. The Reimagine Schools to Transform Children's Lives had a checklist on how to unlock funds. Items included the institution of universal and correct masking, which Mr. McNamara feels is asinine and inhumane. He says there is no data on the benefits and that there is no injury or death for children if they contract COVID. Mr. McNamara would like answers on the following questions: 1) how much money did we receive through ESSER? 2) Were parents notified of the necessary checklist in order to receive the money? 3) How many OSHA-regulated Hazmat containers were or are being used and where is the waste being taken? He was recently at Highland Park School and there were discarded masks all over the playground. He will follow up with the Board in an email.

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT – PART I

F.1. Update on Culture & Climate

Mr. Geary reviewed the definition of school climate versus school culture. Climate is the feel of the school (the schools' attitude/behaviors); the behavior and point of view exhibited and experienced by students, teachers and others. The culture of the school is the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates (the personality of a school), the underlying norms and values that shape patterns of behavior, attitudes and expectations between stakeholders in the school.

We have experienced student dysregulation and concern from the community recently. The climate in the entire U.S. right now is fraught with angst, changing, highly emotional, crazy and polarized. School climates reflect the community, state and national climates. These children have lived through COVID and the younger kids don't even know or remember a non-COVID life. In addition, over the past year they have seen the Capital 1/6/21 violence, Black Lives Matter protests, social media like SnapChat, and school violence throughout the country. The mood of schools is reflective of the mood of the world.

The vision for Manchester Public Schools is that we will be characterized by the following:

- A strong belief that all children can learn.

- Adults who are committed to ensuring success for all students by providing equal access and opportunities.
- A climate that fosters learning and high achievement and is characterized by mutual respect, care, and concern for all students, staff and families.
- A student population in all schools that represents the diversity in the District as a whole.

Our vision is that all students in the Manchester Public Schools will:

- Demonstrate positive values and beliefs as evidenced by respect for peers and adults; a strong work ethic; a growth mindset; and kindness and caring for themselves and others.
- Make decisions that have positive results for themselves and others; manage their time effectively; advocate for themselves; embrace and value differences in all people; and assume responsibility for their own actions.
- Be prepared to make sound personal decisions regarding a healthy, productive lifestyle, including diet, health maintenance, exercise including athletics, and positive leisure activities.

All staff in the Manchester Public Schools will support student growth by:

- Developing and implementing a systematic approach to teach and reinforce expected behaviors.
- Ensuring equitable, logical, and developmentally appropriate consequences and opportunities for restorative and collaborative practices when behaviors occur that do not meet expectations.
- Teaching, modeling and upholding common expectations for how all members of the school community interact with each other.
- Partnering with students to set and achieve high expectations and determine interventions to support all students
- Developing students' academic and social emotional skills to ensure success.
- Establishing classroom environments that are engaging and supportive of the individual needs of all students.

The culture and climate goals are that all students will demonstrate personal responsibility, character, cultural understanding, and ethical behavior. For district

and building level faculty and staff, the goal is to build relationships based on trust through listening, welcoming, respecting individual differences, and allowing for shared decision making with parents, families, and other stakeholders.

Mr. Geary presented survey data from students, staff and families regarding MPS. He reviewed the community building efforts in each grade level:

- Elementary - Social Emotional Learning Lessons and Equity Read Alouds
- Bennet - Daily Advisory Period
- Illing - CREW 2x per week
- MHS - Mentoring once a week

Interventions in the district include:

- Parent contact
- Mediation social contracts
- Individual and small group counseling by school staff
- Behavior intervention plans developed with the support of a BCBA
- Additional Human Capital (paraprofessionals, Behavior Techs) assigned to support students in classrooms
- Community Health Resources - clinicians assigned to each school and an APRN to support management of medications
- District-wide Learning Centers
- Outplacements when necessary

Student accountability includes:

- Detention
- In-School Suspension
- Out-of-School Suspension
- Expulsion

Mr. Geary explained the definition of bullying, which was recently expanded by the legislature. Bullying cases are investigated by school personnel and, if necessary, by the District Safe School Climate Coordinator. This is all documented in a safety plan for the students involved. There are currently five cases of bullying in the district.

The next steps for Manchester Public Schools include:

- Continue to recruit, hire and train staff to support behavioral needs of students at all grade levels
- Ensure mental health needs of students and families are prioritized by providing support, including social work and counseling services and family outreach
- Implement on site services and case management for Mental Health Support through Community Health Resources
- Continue to partner with parents and families to improve school climate and culture

Mr. Orsene wondered what Mr. Geary feels is the biggest issue today in society. Mr. Geary thought there are multiple big issues, including technology (which has good and bad features), isolation, and the pace of the world. Adults need to model acceptable behavior and that is lacking. Relationships are important and we need students to feel connected to an adult in their building and having access to therapy is important.

Ms. Stefanovicz thanked Mr. Geary for the comprehensive report. She wondered if we have data to show the behaviors from the first conflict and when and how it escalates in severe cases. Mr. Geary notes we do track referrals and Assistant Principals spend between 60-80% of their time dealing with behaviors. There are preventative efforts, talking to students, following up. This works about 80% of the time. Sometimes parents call to report repeated incidents against their child, but sometimes that is the first time the school is hearing about a problem. When parents are not given information about the other student involved with their child, that does not mean we do nothing. Sometimes that is the way parents interpret that. We cannot share information about other students with parents.

Ms. Stefanovicz noted that parents have a need for empathy. They want to feel seen and heard and included in the solution. Mr. Geary notes we do spend a lot of time listening to parents and building those relationships, but we can all be better at that. People are frustrated with the lack of control over their lives currently.

Ms. Patterson asked where the definition of bullying came from. Mr. Geary advised that this is a state level definition and reminded the Board that the state recently changed the definition from “repeated, over time” to “severe” so bullying can be one incident alone.

Ms. Patterson asked how CHR (Community Health Resources) approaches families for services. Can parents self-select their own therapist? Mr. Geary reviewed that school counselors or social workers refer families to CHR or help parents find other supports. Outplacements are the last step, however are not only used for extreme behaviors. Many times the students have severe medical challenges or autism with severe behaviors. Sometimes extreme behavioral concerns are outplaced short-term to help the student build the necessary skills to function in a classroom setting.

Ms. Patterson asked about the diversion program. Mr. Geary notes we try to avoid the pipeline to prison. When he started back in 2012 there were 100 arrests at schools. Now only the most severe cases involve arrests. There are court division programs as well.

F.2. Update on COVID-19

Mr. Geary reviewed how we track COVID and the changes we have made. This new variant seems to be more easily transmissible, through we are still seeing minimal in-school transmission.

Ms. Mix was confused about how a case is verified. Mr. Geary stated that currently, we are trusting those reporting. Ultimately, we may require proof.

Mr. Orsene asked about the mask mandate. He noted the current mandate expires February 15. When that expires in the state, will we lift the requirement for masks in the school district? Mr. Geary stated we are under the governor’s mandate. If the governor’s emergency powers expire we would bring the subject to the board for a decision.

F.3. Buckley School FF&E

Mr. Geary stated it is only 6-8 months until Buckley will be complete. He told the Board that tonight Randall Luther, from TSKP Studio, will present the bid

items under furniture, fixtures and equipment. We will then have to vote on a motion approving the documents under New Business.

Mr. Luther reported that we are asking to go to bid for these items a little earlier than typical due to delivery issues plaguing the world currently. Mr. Luther mentioned that Janet O'Connell, Director of Interiors with TSKP, looked at what we used in our other recently renovated buildings and put together a list for Buckley. Pictures of typical items for classrooms and offices were reviewed. The total cost for these items is \$933,272. Last week TSKP Studio met with the Building Committee, who approved the proposal.

Mr. Eisenthal wondered how much of our contingency fund has already been used. Mr. Luther noted very little has been touched thus far, maybe \$200,000 of the \$1.4million budget. He feels we are still in a good position to fund any overages at this point.

Mr. Geary pointed out that if funds become an issue there are some things we could do. He suggested that Food Services, who has a healthy budget, could possibly help purchase tables for cafeterias.

Mr. Luther reviewed that the next two items for the Board to review will be the technology package and the playground package.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

H. NEW BUSINESS

H.1. Approval of Buckley Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment Plan

Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved for the Board of Education to approve the plans and specifications for Fixtures, Furnishings, and Equipment for Buckley Elementary School dated January 3, 2022, prepared by TSKP Studio and the associated cost estimate, for submission to the Department of Administrative Services,

Office of School Construction Grants for review of final plans. Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion

7/0 - Voted in favor.

H.2. Revisions to 21-22 School Calendar

Mr. Geary stated that he had attempted to use a different schedule this year with the elementary schools to allow for Professional Development time for staff and lessen the disruption of a weekly half day for parents. Unfortunately this has proved very challenging. Currently the school day in the elementary schools ends at 3:00 and walkers and those picked up by parents are dismissed. Bus students are supervised until buses are available at 3:40. Staffing for this time period, from 3:00 until buses are loaded and leave, has been extremely challenging. At this point, Mr. Geary is suggesting that we extend the elementary school day to 3:30 and institute a weekly early dismissal on Wednesdays at 2:00 pm, as we do in grades 5-12. He would like to start this new schedule the week of January 31st to give parents a couple of weeks to plan.

Ms. Stefanovicz wondered if MELC would be offered for anyone that has difficulty with a 2:00 pm dismissal on Wednesdays? Mr. Geary is going to look into that and noted that for current MELC afternoon families, they will begin their MELC supervision at 2:00 on Wednesdays.

Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved to approve the revisions to the 21-22 school calendar, which extends the elementary school day from 3:00 to 3:30 and adds a 2:00 early dismissal each Wednesday through June 2, 2022. Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion.

7/0 - Voted in favor.

H.3. Approval of 22-23 School Calendar

Mr. Geary noted that they attempted to look at starting school before Labor Day next year, but with the construction projects still going on, we need those extra days. We are going to continue with an early dismissal on Wednesdays for next

school year. This summer we are planning a one month summer program, which is a little shorter than last year. The program will serve current K-4 students and there will also be programs for 8 going into 9. Last summer the program was too big and we were stretched too thin.

Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved to approve the 2022-23 school calendar. Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the motion.

7/0 - Voted in favor.

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

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, hopes the Buckley project is going well. He felt the COVID update was comprehensive and wondered about how many families in Manchester homeschool their children. He would like to see a report on this as he is curious. Mr. Stringfellow recommended an article on the critical race theory. He noted that Black History Month starts soon and he recommended a book, *A Season - Finding Your Roots* by Dr. Henry Lewis Cates.

Mr. Geary stated there was a question from a parent on-line about school lunches and he will get that information.

J. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Monday, January 24, 2022 - Update on Humanities / STEM 5-12
Budget Presentation

Thursday, February 3, 2022 - Adoption of Budget

Monday, February 14, 2022 - Winter Data Update
Update on Student Behavioral Supports

L. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Patterson called for a motion to adjourn.

Acting Secretary Stefanovicz moved and Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

7/0 - Voted in favor.

Adjournment 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Stefanovicz
Acting Board Secretary