

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Regular Meeting  
February 14, 2022  
Lincoln/Virtual**

**PRESENT:** Eisenthal, Kohls, Mix, Ntem-Mensah, Orsene, Pattacini, Patterson, Stefanovicz

**ALSO PRESENT:** Superintendent of Schools Geary, Deputy Superintendent Curriculum & Special Services Radikas, Asst. Superintendent of Finance & Management Clancy, Asst. Superintendent of Human Capital & Talent Development

**ABSENT:** Meggers

**A. OPENING**

**A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order**

**Chairperson Pattacini** called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mr. Pattacini.

**A.3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**APPROVED – Minutes Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of February 3, 2022. Secretary Patterson moved and Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion.**

**8/0 – Voted in favor.**

**B. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

None.

**C. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**Mr. Geary** presented four 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 Music Consultants account to System-wide Music Computer Equipment account in the amount of \$15,425.00
- Transfer from System-wide Medical Services Travel/Lodging account to System-wide Medical Services Professional Development account in the amount of \$85.00.

**C.3. Extended Field Trip Request - Eight (8) MHS Students, Four (4) Chaperones, MHS Track & Field Team - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - April 27, 2022 - April 30, 2022**

**C.4. Extended Field Trip Request - Eight (8) MHS Students, Two (2) Chaperones, MHS Wrestling Team - Trumbull, Connecticut - February 18, 2022 - February 19, 2022**

**The Chairman called for a motion.**

**Secretary Patterson moved and Ms. Stefanovicz seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar as outlined in the agenda.**

**DISCUSSION:**

**Mr. Eisenthal** asked about the process for approving field trips like these, as one of the trips had already taken place. Mr. Geary reviewed that the Board approves all extended field trips, which are typically submitted 30 days in advance. International trips require a four month notice. Occasionally there are trips, such as the one this evening, where we did not know ahead of time that we would be participating or the dates of such an event.

**8/0 - Voted in favor.**

#### **D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT**

**Alexandra Hamza** was present and wished everyone a Happy Valentine's Day!

-This weekend the indoor track team competed at the LL championships and some athletes are now preparing for the State Open. News on spring sports will be coming soon.

-Last Tuesday, 59 Manchester High School students were inducted into the National Honor Society. It was great to hear that these students had an in-person induction this year!

-The Bailey Auditorium also hosted another event last week: the Midwinter Concert. There were performances by the Percussion Ensemble, the Jazz Choir, the Roundtable Singers, the Chamber Orchestra and the Jazz Band. It was the first time some of these groups performed in front of an audience, and despite this, it was a great event.

-Today marked the first day of spirit week at Manchester High School! Students were encouraged to wear cupid's colors: white, red, purple, and pink. Most students are looking forward to the 'bring anything but a backpack' day tomorrow. We'll be sure to see many baskets and tote bags.

#### **E. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Julio Pena, 43 Scarborough Road, was here two weeks ago when we discussed the budget. Mr. Pena feels an almost 4% increase is too much and noted we have not had that large an increase in the last several years. Mr. Pena, who stated he is a teacher at Cheney Tech, feels everything is more expensive now, the reassessments are being done, and what really matters is teachers and families. More money does not always make things better. He is disappointed and concerned. He would like to view a line item of the proposed budget. He can only find previous budgets online.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, spoke about Black History Month. He recommended the documentaries all month on PBS. Mr. Stringfellow spoke about gun safety. He hopes all students are successful. Mr. Stringfellow recommended the book *Inequality Machine -How College Divides Us*, as well as *What White People Can Do Next*, and an article in the *Boston Globe*.

Sheralyn Lazu, 22 Oak Grove Street, appreciates that throwing money at something won't solve the problem, however she finds it hard to judge the needs of the students and schools unless you engage with the community. Ms. Stefanovicz had proposed that other Board members also attend PTA meetings and get to know our schools and families. Ms. Lazu pointed out that the Board members represent the constituents of Manchester and she feels they cannot adequately do that unless they engage with them. Teachers and other staff are exhausted, overworked and overwhelmed. There is not enough support staff such as noon aides, Behavior Techs and the like and teachers are doing some of the work that support staff previously did. There are some families that can afford to move or send their children to private schools, but some, including her family, can only apply for a magnet school where the money follows the child. We need to invest in our schools or we will continue to have the same problems. We do not know the mil rate yet. There are challenges in schools. We need to let the teachers teach and not have to parent the students as well. Ms. Lazu hopes that Board members will resume their liaison duties soon.

Jeff Sullivan, 54 Tracey Drive, commended Mr. Geary for ending the mask mandate in schools and he hopes the Board allows this choice. It is long overdue in his opinion. Mr. Sullivan feels that masks are ineffective and says the CDC agrees. He feels making people wear masks was an exercise in obedience and a dangerous precedent to set. He cannot wait to see smiling faces again. Mr. Sullivan went on to state that he feels the vaccine mandates are unethical and unconscionable. He feels vaccines do not provide immunity or lessen transmission and are morally wrong. Mr. Sullivan feels vaccines are gene therapy and experimental and he calls on all parents to refuse. He says all risk requires choice. Mr. Sullivan stated that less than one child a year has died from COVID-19. He feels we should not be guinea pigs for the profit of Big Pharma. Eliminating the religious exemption is wrong but when the public is willing to comply it gives them power. Public officials are supposed to serve us, not the other way around.

Colin McNamara, 47 Grandview Street, agrees with doing away with the mask mandate. He feels we were sold a bill of goods and feels we have not seen the end of masks. The Department of Public Health has said they will use masks in the future as a mitigation tool for illness. He hopes people will do the research and learn about the effectiveness of masks or ineffectiveness themselves. He feels COVID will come back strong next fall. Mr. McNamara next talked about vaccines being gene therapy and

requiring them violates his body rights, parental rights, and religious rights and he claims aborted fetal cells are used.

## **F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT – PART I**

Items F.1. and F.2. were switched.

### **F.1. Buckley Technology Package**

**Mr. Randall Luther** from TSKP Studio reviewed that this evening's package is similar to how the last two packages were approved to be sent to the state for permission to bid. Tonight's package involves technology for Buckley.

Kerri Kearney, Supervisor of Instructional Technology, was present to review the types of technology being ordered for Buckley. She noted that we did not have to purchase laptops for teachers as elementary teachers were given new technology this year. The new laptop has a dock that communicates with other technology and their desk computer, allowing them to move about freely and still have the benefit of a larger screen when they are at their desk. Ms. Kearney also noted that in the last two years we have spent state and federal funds to purchase new Chromebooks and such for students, but incoming Kindergarteners will need iPads.

**Mr. Luther** next showed the floor plans, indicating where the various technologies will go. Some items will be mounted (i.e. whiteboards) and some mobile (on carts) for easy use.

**Mr. Pattacini** reviewed that there is a motion under New Business for the package to proceed to the state. There were no questions.

### **F.2. Superintendent's 2022-23 Recommended Budget**

**Mr. Geary** stated that he heard the feedback from some Board members as well as some members of the public. He and Mrs. Clancy took a look at the current year budget to see if there were areas that could be adjusted for next year.

Mr. Geary noted that there will be one administrator retiring this year and we can reduce that position and have other administrators absorb those duties. He suggested lowering the unemployment line. We estimate this line with a trend

analysis but the pandemic has skewed that. This year we budgeted about \$60,000 and so far have used only \$18,000. Mr. Geary suggested lowering that line from \$50,000 to \$30,000 for next year.

Special Education spending is up about \$1.8 million this year. Some estimated bills have now come in and Mr. Geary feels we can reduce that line under professional services by \$40,000 as well as Special Education Related Services by \$40,000. He suggested taking a cut of \$100,000 in public tuition and \$130,000 in private tuition. Small cuts in printing, advertising and utilities based on current bills leads to a total suggested reduction of \$564,000. He recommends the Board take these cuts.

In addition, Mr. Geary pointed out that Board policy drives several budget lines. He suggests reducing some of those lines by 20%, resulting in an additional reduction of more than \$300,000. We can use some of the non-lapsing fund for those items and that would still leave about \$2million in that fund for future use.

In total, Mr. Geary suggested a total of \$933,000 in reductions/alternate funding, which brings the suggested budget down to a 3.15% increase over the previous year.

**Mr. Eisenthal** asked for clarity on the capital items. They will still get done, just funded from the non-lapsing fund. His concern is does this budget provide for adequate compensation, maintain our infrastructure and equipment, and address our fixed costs. Mr. Geary stated he believes it does. He pointed out that we are not adding any new positions. This is a unique time, during a pandemic, with federal funds coming in and a reevaluation and new mil rate along with inflation. Mr. Geary agrees that we need all the support staff necessary.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** asked if the Special Education costs would be lowered from \$1.8 million to \$1.5 million. That was correct.

**Mr. Geary** spoke with the Town Manager to try to discern the impact of the reevaluation and worked to lessen that impact.

**Mr. Pattacini** thanked the administration for their work both on the initial recommended budget as well as this diligent work to adjust and change the budget so it can be adopted this evening. He wants to ensure the best and most services for our students with the money we have. Mr. Pattacini reviewed that once we approve this recommended budget it will be given to the Town Manager who will then add it to his Town budget. The Board of Directors will hold several budget workshops, just as we did, to work towards adopting a Town budget. At that point the Board of Education will hold another set of budget workshops to adjust our budget to match whatever number the Board of Directors approves.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** reviewed that the proposed 3.15% budget increase provides for the same number of teachers and other staff. We have to absorb an additional \$1.5 million in Special Education costs, a \$700,000 increase in healthcare, about \$2million in contractual obligations, as well as an increase in transportation costs. Ms. Stefanovicz encouraged fellow members of the Board to ask any questions now and not later. She hopes they come from the perspective of a seat on the Board of Education, who has a financial obligation to support our children. We are the Board of Education, not the Board of Directors. Our rules and bylaws dictate that we approve a recommended budget from the Superintendent to support teaching and learning in our district.

**Mr. Pattacini** reviewed that there are options tonight. We could approve the original Superintendent's budget, which was a 3.95% increase, or the one presented this evening which represents a 3.15% increase. He will ask for a consensus under new business.

### **F.3. Covid-19 Update**

**Mr. Geary** mentioned his letter to the community regarding lifting the mask mandate effective February 28th. The Governor and Department of Health have said masks are no longer necessary. It is not about choice, we were following the recommendations of the experts, whether we liked it or not. There was no local decision making regarding COVID. This was a public health emergency and the Governor determines the rules for dealing with that. This does not mean we will not have masks back again. No Board action is required on this topic, as we were following the guidance of the Department of Public Health as well as the

directive of the Governor. The exceptions to this include HeadStart, which is federally funded, and school buses.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** wondered if we will provide masks to bus drivers to hand out. Mr. Geary will look into that, though he does not want to burden drivers.

**Ms. Patterson** wondered if town buildings will also lift the mandate on the 28th. Mr. Geary will look into that.

**Mr. Pattacini** thanked the Department of Public Health in the town and state, for navigating us through the pandemic. We are in a better place than we were two years ago.

## **G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **G.1. Adoption of Recommended Budget**

**Mr. Pattacini** noted the original recommended budget was \$122,422,774.93, which represented a 3.95% increase over the current budget. Mr. Geary proposed several cuts this evening for a proposed budget of \$121,489,162.93, a 3.15% increase. He would like to hear Board Members' feelings on which number they prefer. When he sees a consensus he will call the question to vote.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** was hesitant at first to agree with the 3.15% increase, but she does understand the stress and anxiety of the public so she will support it.

**Mr. Eisenthal** is also willing to support 3.15%.

**Ms. Patterson** thanked Mr. Geary and Mrs. Clancy. She understands that our responsibility as Board of Education members is to approve a budget that allows for the operation of our district and puts our students, teachers and staff as a priority. She appreciates the due diligence and opportunities to make adjustments. She does understand our fiscal responsibility among some unknown factors. Ms. Patterson was also hesitant to cut from the original budget. We have to ensure our students have the support they need to be successful. She will support the 3.15% increase.

**Mr. Pattacini** also supports the superintendent's recommendation. He feels that Mr. Geary does a great job running our district, especially during these trying times. Our staff give their all. Mr. Pattacini supports the 3.15% budget increase as well, noting that makes a majority so he called for a motion.

**Secretary Patterson moved for the Board of Education to approve the budget in the amount of \$121,489,162.93. Mr. Eisenthal seconded the motion.**

**6/0/2 - Voted in favor.**

**Mr. Pattacini** reviewed that after the meeting he, Mr. Geary and Mrs. Clancy will get the budget to the Town Manager.

**Ms. Clancy** asked about waiving some of the policies, but it is not necessary at this time. That will be done when the final budget numbers are approved in the spring.

## **H. NEW BUSINESS**

### **H.1. Buckley Technology Approval**

**Secretary Patterson moved for the Board of Education to approve the plans and specifications for Technology Equipment for Buckley Elementary School dated February 7, 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. Ms. Mix seconded the motion.**

**8/0 - Voted in favor.**

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

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, enjoyed the presentation on the Buckley technology and feels it is money well spent. Regarding COVID he feels we need to follow science. Mr. Stringfellow talked about American safety, an article on COVID in

*TIME*, and how some have long haul effects from the disease. We have to come together as Americans. We are all in this together. Last, Mr. Stringfellow mentioned racism and childhood obesity.

**J. COMMUNICATIONS**

None.

**K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS**

|                           |                                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Monday, February 28, 2022 | Winter Data Update                    |
| Monday, March 14, 2022    | Update on Technology<br>Food Services |
| Monday, March 28, 2022    | Update on Humanities / STEM 5-12      |

**L. ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Pattacini called for a motion to adjourn.**

**Secretary Patterson moved and Mr. Ntem-Mensah seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.**

**8/0 - Voted in favor.**

**Adjournment 8:23 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Patterson  
Board Secretary