

MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Regular Meeting February 22, 2021 Lincoln/Virtual

PRESENT: Gundersen, Heinrich, Hughes, Luna, Meggers, Pattacini, Patterson, Stefanovicz, Thames

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

ABSENT:

A. OPENING

A.1. & 2. Meeting Called to Order

Chairperson Thames called the meeting to order at 7:05 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 February 8, 2021. Secretary Pattacini moved and Mr. Heinrich seconded the motion.

9/0 – Voted in favor.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

B.1. Policy Committee

Mr. Gundersen reported the last meeting was held February 8th With himself, Mr. Hughes, Mr. Thames and Mr. Geary present.

The members discussed the MPS Equity Policy along with the Equity Policy Considerations document. The Superintendent will add a question regarding the fiscal impact of the change and the policy will be moved to the full Board for a first reading.

The members reviewed several area district policies on electronic devices at the middle and high school levels, including the policy and practices of MPS. A summary of policies was provided to the Board. At the middle school, devices are not to be used during the school day. At the high school, devices can be used in common spaces and for educational purposes in classrooms. The Superintendent will invite a cross section of parents, students and staff to the next Policy meeting to discuss the use of devices at MHS.

The Committee reviewed the Board of Education Liaison section of Community Relations Policy #1121. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, Board members' interactions with school communities will likely look different than initially designed. Board members are asked to reach out to school principals by phone or email to set up a brief check-in and discuss how they might engage with the school community.

The cost for the School Resource Officers (SRO) is incorporated into the 2021-2022 Board of Education budget. The Board funds half the cost of SROs. The Board will engage in future discussions with the Board of Directors regarding SROs at an appropriate time.

The Superintendent shared some areas where legislative action may be needed for 2021-2022, both due to the continuation of the pandemic and if we wish to continue some new approaches (such as virtual snow days) that have been utilized this year. The areas include student attendance, school calendar - 180 days/900 hours, transportation, student discipline and certification.

Mr. Thames added that the ability to be a school liaison has been hampered by Covid. As activities transition to being held virtually (such as PTA meetings, etc.) Board members may be able to attend, as he has. He urges Board members to contact the principals they are assigned to and he will review the list to be sure everyone has an accurate assignment.

C. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mr. Geary presented three 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 Language Arts Instructional Supplies and Materials account to System-wide Language Arts Professional Development account in the amount of \$1,085
- Transfer from Illing Middle School Sports Athletic Trips account to Illing Middle School Art Instructional Supplies and Materials account in the amount of \$717

C.3. Establish an appropriation for The Immigrant & Youth Education Program Grant for the FY 20-22 in the amount of \$9,500

The Chairman called for a motion.

Secretary Pattacini moved and Ms. Patterson seconded the recommendation to adopt the Consent Calendar.

9/0 - Voted in favor.

D. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Alexandra Hamza reported that on Wednesday the 17th students had another Red Hawk Talk, which is a 15 minute one on one with their mentors, discussing grades and strategies to pass and stay motivated. This Red Hawk Talk was mainly for editing student resumes and checking in on the college application progress. The end of senior year is becoming a reality amongst all as seniors begin to submit their senior quotes and superlatives for the yearbook.

Ms. Hamza reviewed that today was day 5 of the Black History Month video presentations that have been happening, it's only day five because of all the weather and no school days that have been happening. Today's presentation was done by no other than Leila Affini and it was about what to do beyond black history month. It was

very informative and well received across in-person school and remote learning. The same video will be played tomorrow for the other cohort.

Leila Affini mentioned that kids have started meetings with their counselors regarding their schedules for next year, which is kind of exciting because it's like a promise of a new beginning. Also, Winter Sports are on despite the pandemic: Indoor track and Boys Swim is ongoing and basketball teams have played their first games.

Mr. Thames was happy to see some basketball games posted on FaceBook and he likes seeing some form of normalcy happening. He mentioned that players are given two passes each to invite spectators. Mr. Thames was also excited to hear talk of the end of year superlatives, recalling he was voted tallest in his class!

Ms. Luna wondered what senior activities may have been cancelled or postponed this year due to Covid. The girls were not sure and mentioned that the graduation ceremony plan is up in the air and picture day was held virtually so some fun aspects, such as sibling and friend picture groups, were not able to take place.

E. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None live. Mr. Geary read highlights of a message from Gene DeJoannis of the Sustainability Task Force. He asked about the plans for changing buses from diesel to electric, which will be a requirement phased in over the coming years (30% required to be electric by 2030 and all by 2050). He asked about planning for charging stations at schools as we do renovations. He also inquired about the R value of the MHS roof replacement.

Mr. Geary will look into the preliminary research regarding the buses and will have more information on that topic as well as the R value of the roof for the next meeting.

Mr. Thames pointed out that four years ago making space for a charging station for electric buses during a renovation was not even a conversation.

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT – PART I

F.1. Winter Data Update

Mr. Geary reminded us that this has been a year unlike any other. He gave an overview of the data from this winter compared to last winter, noting there is no

spring data from last year to compare to. The full presentation is available online. Overall, the take aways include:

- In grades K-4 the Fountas and Pinnell data shows our students are approximately 10 points behind where they were last year, which is less of a drop than was anticipated. Not all the numbers were back yet regarding math fluency in K-4, although approximately 15% less students met or exceeded grade level compared to the previous year. In grades K-8 students remain strong on math unit assessments. We are concerned about all grades, but there is a focus on grades 1, 2 and 3 as they seem to have lost the most in the foundational learning. As we are able to come back into buildings more we will continue to provide additional support and focus on these grades.
- The SATs are typically given in the spring for grade 11 and were given in the fall instead. Reading scores continued to trend up, although about 100 less students took the test this year. Math scores did fall this year after previously trending up.
- The high school graduation rate has remained nearly flat, even though there was an increase in the number of credits required for graduation in recent years. The graduation rate shows smaller gaps between groups and continues to narrow.
- The chronically absent rate for both in-person and remote learners has been about 33%. This really cannot be compared to previous years as it is clearly inflated by the pandemic.
- At the high school there have been more students achieving As and Fs, while less students are landing in the B, C, D range.

Next steps:

- Adjust programming in grades K-12 based on winter data as needed.
- Develop and implement opportunities for skill development and credit recovery beginning in April 2021.

- Monitor vaccine timeline to ensure PS educators are vaccinated as soon as possible.
- Consider extending time in school for in-person learners in grades 5-12 (with corresponding increase for remote students) once educators are vaccinated.
- Approve school calendar that includes two summer sessions for interested students grades K-12.
- Establish summer programming design team.
- Identify summer programming leadership staff.
- Post summer programming positions.
- Communicate summer programming information to parents and families as part of spring parent conferences.
- Develop summer programming, which includes opportunities for individualized academic skill development, health and wellness, and recreational activities.

Mr. Geary reminded us that they anticipate a 2-3 year recovery timeline and have built budget decisions based on that. Currently, Mr. Geary informed us that Governor Lamont shared his projected budget and he wants to withhold approximately \$1.7 million in ECS funding from Manchester and have us use the Federal Relief Funds to make up for that loss. We are opposed to this and do not believe the federal funds were intended to replace state monies. That does not provide a commitment to equity at all. Superintendents are expressing their concerns to the governor.

Mr. Pattacini wondered about the chronic absence rate and what we are able to do. He wondered if the number of students chronically absent aligns with the drop in academic scores. Mr. Geary noted that regardless of the absence rate, the number of instructional hours has dropped, which plays a part in the scores dropping. The absence of course impacts the achievement rate. The disruption of schedule changes, quarantines, remote snow days, is hard for parents and students alike. We have continued with home visits, calls and giving opportunities for makeup work.

Mr. Pattacini wonders what we can do as a Board to help the Governor realize his position is not equitable and we need to be fully funded before his budget is signed. Mr. Geary noted the Governor does not have the final say, but our local

legislators do. With the Governor's plan the people who make out the most are more suburban as typically the more money we get the less they do. We need to meet with the local legislative delegation. Our issue is that we do not believe the federal money was intended for this purpose. Over two years the Governor is looking at cutting approximately 3.4 million. We may get additional federal funding, but we do not know at this time. The federal government sends a message about appropriately funding school systems and this plan from Governor Lamont does not do that.

Mr. Gundersen would like to see deeper data regarding the chronic absence rate. Mr. Geary will send along that information identified by school and remote or hybrid learner. The definition of chronically absent is missing 10% or more school days. In some cases students may actually do the work and not attend the class, so defining that for older students is a little different.

Ms. Patterson wondered about the increase in the number of students achieving As at the high school level and if there is anything contributing to that we may learn from. Mr. Geary noted that at the high school level many things contribute to success, including endurance and access playing a role. Some students work better with this streamlined amount of work, are able to self-manage and have good access to resources. Some students need more structure and better access. Mr. Thames agreed that what each students needs and where they flourish is so different, noting one of his grandsons struggled previously, but has excelled with this new learning model and the opposite has happened with another grandson.

F.2. Update on Covid-19

Mr. Geary noted that cases are declining in Connecticut and across the nation. In Connecticut currently there are 23.1 cases for every 100,000 people (which is 22.9 in Manchester). The infection rate has dropped to 1.82%. Our ICU capacity is about 58%. All of these numbers continue to trend down. In CT approximately 16% of residents have had their first vaccine shot.

In our schools there were four cases last week, which is far less than what we were looking at previously. There has been minimal inter-school spread. We have 500 rapid tests available in schools if someone is symptomatic (they can

drive up and test). We are monitoring travel and sent out travel guidelines to staff so they can plan for testing upon return if required.

We are monitoring the vaccine timeline. Mr. Geary participated in a call with the Department of Public Health today. As of March 1st education staff and related people (ie bus drivers, etc.) are eligible for vaccines. Board of Education staff that do not otherwise qualify (based on age or other factors) do NOT fall in this group. The goal is to have all educators vaccinated with their first dose by the end of March. Studies show the first dose proves to be approximately 85% effective. We are talking about how to participate in local clinics to quickly vaccinate our staff, possibly in schools. Counting our staff, bus drivers and MELC staff we need about 500 vaccines a week and the town is currently receiving about 50. There is projected to be an increase in that number soon but Mr. Geary reminds us that we have to be patient.

Once educators are vaccinated we have to think about adding time to the school day, for grade 5-6 next. This will mean less social distancing, though other mitigating measures will remain. We need to look at the impact of that. This is a long tunnel but we can see the light at the end...it is just far off yet. At this time they are thinking the vaccine may only last 90 days and we may need a booster.

Ms. Luna pointed out that those educational employees who do not need to be in a school and/or telecommute are not on the vaccine list yet. She wondered who that impacts in our district. Mr. Geary pointed out that the business office staff and educators that are fully remote (meaning they do not come into the building to teach remotely, but do so 100% from home) would not qualify.

Mr. Thames asked what exactly the March 1st date means. Mr. Geary stated as of March 1st if you are on this list you are qualified to make an appointment for a vaccine.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

H. NEW BUSINESS

H.1. Equity Policy

Mr. Pattacini reviewed this is a first read of the policy change (#8002) and it will come for a vote at the next meeting. There were no questions.

H.2. Board of Education 2021-2022 School Calendar

Secretary Pattacini moved for the Board of Education to approve the Manchester Board of Education Calendar for the 2021-2022 School Year. Mr. Heinrich seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Stefanovicz asked about the summer plans.

Mr. Geary thought long about the maximum amount of time students can accelerate learning over the summer and not burn out students or staff. He notes school will be out the second week of June and there will be about two weeks off for staff to rejuvenate. There will be two summer sessions of three weeks each, with one week off in between to provide some down-time, and then another week off before school starts in the fall.

Mr. Geary envisions a full day program this summer, as it is too difficult for parents to plan for part-day programming. This program will support kids as they reacclimate to a semi-normal setting five days a week. Some of the key items the program will include are credit recovery for the high school, skill building, enrichment units, reading, technology and targeted help in reading. We will partner with MELC and the Rec Department to provide a recreational aspect to the day as well. Students will be able to participate in many activities they have missed out on this past year.

This program will not look like the usual credit recovery or SAAM summer programming of the past. There will be a high level of interactive programming, academics, a wellness component and will be infused with experiences for our students.

Mr. Geary noted they are still working on the details and transportation issues and noted there may be some remote help for students unable to attend in person, though there has not been a ton of success in running a remote summer program in the past.

Ms. Stefanovicz asked if families have been communicated with yet. Mr. Geary stated that once the Board approves the calendar that will be the next step. Report card conferences are coming up and that will be an opportunity for teachers to talk directly with parents about the program. Parents will be able to choose to have their child participate in one or both sessions.

The vote was called.

9/0 - Voted in favor.

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

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, stated that this is the last week of Black History Month, founded by Carter Woodson 45 years ago. Mr. Stringfellow recommended several books on the topic. He also mentioned last Monday was President's Day and recommended a book on Lincoln and a docu-drama on CNN about him. Last, Mr. Stringfellow mentioned an article in the *New York Times* yesterday on how to safely reopen our schools.

Mr. Geary reported on questions from FaceBook. One was about the teacher's vaccine timeline, which is still being worked out, but they qualify as of March 1st.

Another question was about community access to the indoor pools. Mr. Geary stated they are still not allowing visitors into school buildings, though this will be reconsidered in the future.

Last, there was a question about math fluency and Mr. Geary envisions summer programming to provide math help as well as allowing access to Dreambox over the summer for students to access from home.

J. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

K. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

March 8 - MHS Improvement Plan

March 22 - Martin School Improvement Plan

April 8 - Highland Park Improvement Plan

L. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Thames called for a motion to adjourn.

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

9/0 - Voted in favor.

Adjournment 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Pattacini
Board Secretary