

MINUTES



**Addison Central School District
ACSD Board
Board Meeting
Monday, September 25, 2023, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
208 Charles Avenue, Middlebury VT & Virtual Connection**

ACSD District Vision and Mission

OUR VISION

Our vision is for all ACSD students to reach their full learning potential, have a sense of belonging in our schools, and enrich our community and the communities where they live in the future.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to provide high-quality, equitable, and varied learning environments that inspire a passion for learning and growth among our students.

In-Person Attendance

Barbara Wilson; Brian Bauer; Ellen Whelan-Wuest; Ellie Romp; James Malcolm; Jamie McCallum; Jason Chance; Joanna Doria; Mary Heather Noble; Steve Orzech; Suzanne Buck; Tricia Allen

Remote Attendance

Lindsey Hescok

A. Call to Order Upon Reaching A Quorum

Barb Wilson

Meeting called to order at 6:31 p.m.

1. Introductions - Board Members, Administrators, and Staff

5 min

ACSD Staff present: Tim Williams, Interim Superintendent; Heather Crowley, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent; Nicole Carter, Assistant Superintendent and Director of Equity and Student Services; Courtney Krahn, Director of Teaching and Learning; Matt Corrente, Director of Finance and Operations; Caitlyn Steele, Principal of MUHS; Michaela Wisell, Principal of MUMS; Jen Kravitz, Principal of Mary Hogan School; Isabel Gogarty, MUMS Health & Wellness teacher; Bjarki Sears, Principal of Salisbury Community School; and Emily Blistein, Director of Communications & Engagement (remote)

2. Public Comment on Agenda Items

10 min

Mary Slosar of Weybridge made a brief request to have the Board Chair show the agenda on the screen when inviting public comment on agenda items, so that people know whether they need to wait.

Addie Lentzner, student at Middlebury College and member of Vermont Anti-racism coalition spoke in support of Esther Charlestin regarding her decision to leave MUMS after enduring racial harassment by students. She grew up near Bennington, VT, and is saddened, but not surprised by the incidents. Her organization has compiled data revealing that at least 60% of

BIPOC students experience racism in their schools. If we do not address this, Vermont will not get better. She implored Board members to examine their own biases, and do the anti-racism work necessary to correct this culture. Do it for Esther, and do it for our society.

Barb Wilson reminded participants to please keep their comments restricted to agenda items. Mary Heather Noble asked if the Equity Work Update item on the agenda was relevant enough to allow for these comments to continue at the beginning of the meeting. Barb agreed to allow it, and invited additional comments.

Makayla Jacobs, another Middlebury College student expressed frustration about the racist incidents reported by Esther Charlestin. She is sick and tired but not surprised. Vermont prides itself on being a progressive state where "Black Lives Matter" but this is not true in practice if people of color are not welcome to live and work beside you. This is 2023 -- you need to start chasing this. These incidents shouldn't have happened.

Barb Wilson invited Esther Charlestin to make her public comment -- Esther stated that she would prefer to give her statement at the second public comment period.

B. Recommendation to Approve Minutes of 9/11/2023 Barb Wilson 5 min

Mary Heather Noble noted that she had accidentally misspelled a citizen's name in the public comment section, and said that she would correct it.

Note: Ellie Romp abstained from the vote.

Motion to approve the minutes, as amended to correct the spelling error in the Public Comment section.

Move: Jason Chance Second: Jamie McCallum Status: Passed

C. Approve ACSD Bills James Malcom 5 min

James Malcolm presented a summary of the bills, which were read by himself and Jason Chance:

General Fund: \$1,363,827.50 -- This large sum consists of lump sum payments to ACSD partner preschool programs and health & dental insurance benefits.

Payroll: \$1,036.68

Payroll: \$ 440.10

Payroll, \$904,402.35

Motion to approve the ACSD bills as presented and authorize payment.

Move: Jamie McCallum Second: Brian Bauer Status: Passed

D. Report of the Student Representative Eddie Fallis 5 min

Student Board Rep Eddie Fallis reported that he and Caitlin Steele are continuing the work of recruiting the next Student Board rep from the MUHS junior class. They will be sending an email out on Wed 9/27. Interested students will submit applications to be reviewed by a committee of 6-7 MUHS teachers. Caitlin Steele mentioned that there is a policy for selecting a student rep, and they will be making their selection according to policy.

The MUHS Activities Fair went well, and SATs will be hosted at MUHS on October 7th.

E. Report of the Superintendent

Tim Williams provided a brief introduction to the District's Equity work, related to the response to increases in hate speech incidents during the 2022-23 academic year. These incidents were highlighted in Esther Charlestin's Op-Ed. Tim stated that in order to understand where the Board and District need to direct policy, it is important for all to understand where the District currently is. He asked Nicole Carter, Director of Equity and Student Services to lead a presentation on the topic.

1. Equity Status Update

Tim Williams 5 min

Nicole Carter provided a presentation about ACSD Board Policies, and how they direct administrative responses to allegations of racism against students and/or staff. Board members requested that the presentation materials be made available in updated meeting materials -- Heather Crowley indicated that she would do so.

Highlights from the presentation:

- The two Board Policies that govern the District's response to allegation of racist incidents include B5, Prevention of Employee Harassment, and C10, Prevention of Hazing, Harassment and Bullying. (HHB).
- In the 2022-23 academic year, the District investigated 72 allegations of HHB, which included allegations of harassment against staff. 7% of those were race-related.
- Nicole outlined the specific process that administrators must follow to be in compliance with Board policy. If the investigation substantiates the allegation, disciplinary action is taken -- which can range from an array of tools (e.g., detention, suspension, working with admin on other specific corrective action, and other restorative work). Nicole is not allowed to discuss specifics, as confidentiality for both the complainant and the accused person is required.
- Both policies also provide an option to create a student or staff safety & support plan, which may include relocation to a different school, other staff supports, counseling, admin leave, etc.
- Both policies also include an internal & independent review process, so that the parties involved can elevate the issue to receive an independent review of the events that transpired with a determination regarding whether the response was sufficient and in compliance with Board policy and State/Federal law. In order for this to occur, the complainant must initiate and participate in the review process.
- These procedures take a lot of administrative time and effort, and the work is very challenging -- especially since the actions taken cannot be shared with the complainant or anyone else.

Questions from the Board:

Ellen Whelan-Wuest noticed a difference between the responses under policy B5 and C10 -- that there seems to be more subjectivity in the substantiation part. Jamie McCallum asked about when the Board is notified of these matters. Nicole responded that neither policy speaks to notifying the Board, and since the responses are confidential student and personnel matters, it is not standard procedure. Mary Heather Noble wondered if the Board is involved if/when a complainant follows the chain of command to request a review of the District's response. Nicole was not aware of any such case during her tenure.

Ellie Romp asked if there are standards or expectations with respect to the range of consequences for substantiated allegations. Nicole again listed the range of tools – again noting that the administrators will likely try to employ a deterring consequence coupled with an educational component. Ellen Whelan-Wuest asked about the types of Restorative Practices that are in place, and whether all school administrators are trained in anti-racism to inform their response.

Joanna Doria asked about the 72 incidents investigated last year, and whether the District is reviewing data to determine whether their responses to the incidents are, in fact deterring recurrence. Mary Heather Noble asked what is the mechanism by which we know whether these procedures to implement policies B5 and C10 are working. Jamie McCallum also asked about the feedback loop to track accountability. Steve Orzech also asked whether any of the District responses have engaged the student's families as well, since so much racist rhetoric can originate from the home. Suzanne Buck noted the limitations of policy, since many of them are rigid and have language required by state law.

Nicole Carter provided some additional details about confidentiality and creation of safety and support plans, and also gave some ideas for work the Board can do to address racism in schools:

- The Board can review and modify the relevant policies (B5, C1, C10, and C29), or consider adding sub-parts to require preventative work.
- The Board can expressly invite the public to these specific conversations so that BIPOC and other community voices can inform policy development.

The Board can adopt the Strategic Plan to establish a structure for anti-racism work not specifically provided in Board policy.

2. Action: Faculty/Staff Appointments/Resignations Tim Williams 5 min

Note: Brian Bauer abstained.

Motion to accept 1) the resignation of Brian Lisko, Individuals & Society Teacher; 2) accept the appointment of Rachel Cosgrove of 1.0 FTE Individuals & Society Teacher, Step 1 as per the Master Agreement; and 3) accept the appointment of Michele DeRosier as the School Nutrition Manager at Shoreham, as a 1.0 FTE on Step 2 of the Food Service schedule.

Move: Joanna Doria Second: Ellen Whelan-Wuest Status: Passed

- a. Accept Resignation of Brian Lisko, Individuals and Society Teacher.
- b. Appoint Rachel Cosgrove as a 1.0 FTE Individuals and Society Teacher, Step 1 as per Master Agreement.
- c. Appoint Michelle DeRosier as the School Nutrition Manager at Shoreham as a 1.00 FTE on Step 2 of the Food Service schedule.

3. McGilton fund update Matthew Corrente 3 min

Matt Corrente and Jen Kravitz provided a budget summary of how Mary Hogan School administrators intend to spend distribution from the McGilton Fund during the 2023-24

academic year. Details are outlined in the meeting materials. No Board approval is needed yet -- the formal request will come later.

4. Presentation: Budget Drivers

Matthew Corrente 40 min

Matt Corrente provided a slideshow presentation to summarize the main budget drivers as the Board and Admin enter the FY25 budget season. He described it as a slightly blurry view that will come into more focus as the budget parameters (especially state-driven numbers) become clearer throughout the year.

The presentation is included in meeting materials. Highlights:

- 3 largest budget drivers: Sunsetting of ESSER funding, Impact of Contract Negotiations and increases in teacher/staff salaries, and Healthcare costs (Note: the ACSD does NOT have any control over these expenses; these are determined at the state level).

- Re: the ESSER Cliff: A significant portion of ESSER funds have been spent on positions, including the Wellness & Learning Coordinator; the Literacy Coordinator; the Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Coordinator; the Dean of Climate & Culture at MUMS; and a number of interventionists throughout the District. If the Board decides to locally fund all \$1.3 Million in salary & benefits for these positions, it will result in a 3.3% increase in per pupil spending.

- Re: Negotiations: The projected range of salary increase for teachers & staff is ~3-6% to retain staff and remain competitive with other districts in VT. For every 1% increase in salary expenses, it will result in a 0.5% increase in per pupil spending.

- Re: Healthcare costs: The administration does not yet know the magnitude of increased cost, just that it will increase. For every 1% increase in healthcare costs for teacher & staff benefits, it will result in a 0.1% increase in per pupil spending

- The cumulative effect of these 3 drivers is expected to mean a ~7.75% increase in the budget.

- In addition to this anticipated ~7.75% increase in the budget due to the main drivers are other factors, including the new Act 127 weighting system (which is projected to have a \$2.8 M impact).

- The other important takeaway is that the State has instituted a spending control in its rollout of the Act 127 new pupil weighting system -- Districts must keep their budget increases at or below 10% to avoid being penalized (removal of grace period for the new pupil weighting system impacts). So ACSD must keep its total FY25 budget increase to 10% or below.

F. Report of the Chair

Barb Wilson 15 min

Barb Wilson requested that Tim Williams arrange for Anti-Racism training for the entire Board as part of the District's current Equity work. Tim agreed to make arrangements for a Board-only training with the facilitator.

1. Superintendent Search Update

Barb Wilson reported that she had talked to Judy Sclair Stein of MacPherson & Jacobson. Judy is not quite happy with the size of the applicant pool, but there are still a few more days left in the application window. But Judy suggested a contingency plan, which consists of keeping the window open for another month and doing some additional advertising (cost:

~\$1,500). It would delay the timeline a bit, but Judy would compress & accelerate her candidate screening.

If the Board authorizes this plan, Judy would keep the application window open until the end of October and present viable candidates to the Board via Zoom around mid-November. The Board could do all-day in-person interviews after Thanksgiving.

Lindsey Hescock asked if we are at risk of losing candidates by extending the timeline. Barb reported that Judy didn't seem concerned about that, and felt the candidate pool would improve with the extension, especially since the Board has begun the process much earlier this time. James Malcom noted that changing the timeline may make it more difficult for all Board members to participate since plan may have already been made on the original schedule.

Motion to authorize Barb Wilson to implement a contingency plan for the Superintendent Search Process by extending the application window by an additional 30 days and incurring ~\$1500 of additional advertising expenses.

Move: Ellen Whelan-Wuest Second: Brian Bauer Status: Passed

2. Parks & Recreation Board Representative Update

Barb Wilson reported that Lindsey Hescock had volunteered to serve as the ACSD Board representative on the Middlebury Parks & Recreation Board.

3. Work Plan Update

Barb Wilson presented the draft Board Work Plan in the meeting materials, noting that it is an attempt to map out essential high-level Board work for the academic year. The Executive Committee is still filling out the details -- please email her with suggestions and comments. Her hope is to have a final work plan ready for Board approval in the next meeting.

G. Report of the Board

25 min

1. Communications & Engagement

Mary Heather Noble

Mary Heather Noble reported that several Board members had attended Back-to-School nights for MUMS, MUHS, Cornwall, Weybridge, Salisbury and Mary Hogan School. She attended the Cornwall school gathering and spoke with a few parents who wanted to know whether the District would be evaluating how IB is working for ACSD. She hopes to make this part of the Board's culture so that the community will expect to see Board reps at these annual events. She invited other Board members who attended events to share feedback they received. Barb Wilson said that she talked to a few people at the MUHS event, but that the event was so focused on student schedules that most folks didn't stop at the Board table. Tricia Allen shared a few specific comments from Mary Hogan school parents and students.

2. Facilities

Jason Chance

Jason Chance reported that the Facilities Committee met that morning and discussed how they would like to see the Facilities Master Plan information organized on the website, so he can collaborate with the Communications & Engagement Committee on how best to preserve those artifacts for easy community access. Jason also reported that the MUHS kitchen renovation project is almost complete -- it is fully functional and has just a few punch list items to finish, so bills will continue to come in.

3. Finance

James Malcom

James Malcolm said the Finance Committee has not met since the 9/11 Board meeting.

4. Negotiations

Steve Orzech

Steve Orzech reported that the Negotiations Committee has met with attorney Chris Leopold to begin contract review, but that they still have not yet been contacted by the Association to officially begin negotiations.

5. Policy

Suzanne Buck

Suzanne Buck reported that the Policy Committee has a large batch of policies under review, and will have several to present to the Board for approval in November.

6. PAHCC

Steve Orzech
Tricia Allen

Steve Orzech and Tricia Allen reported that the PAHCC Board recently met and was given a full tour of the recent facility renovations -- they are significant improvements. PAHCC is also working with Collins Aerospace to develop a professional program with the Career Center.

7. Addison Central SEPAC Update

Suzanne Buck
Joanna Doria

Joanna Doria reported that the first SEPAC meeting is scheduled for October 5th.

8. Middlebury Community TV

Barb Wilson

Barb Wilson reported that the MCTV Board met on September 13, and discussed a desire to have MCTV highlight some of ACSD's student work showcases (e.g., the PYP and MYP culmination projects, and DP Extended Essay projects). Mary Heather Noble asked if MCTV is already connected with Emily Blistein to coordinate highlighting of student work, staff recognition, and school events/celebrations. Barb responded that MCTV will be reaching out.

H. Public Comment - Any Topic

Barb Wilson 10 min

Esther Charlestin read the Op-Ed that had been published in the August 31, 2023 issue of the Addison Independent. She re-stated her belief that the racism she endured while at MUMS is a systematic issue that requires a systematic response. She observed that the administration lacked an anti-racism lens, as well as tools for restorative responses to build a healthy community. While the MUMS principal was supportive and checked in on her, at no time was the District willing or able to fully inform or involve the broader MUMS community in any discussion about the racism she (and likely other BIPOC people) experienced while there. Her problem was not with what happened, but the lack of real corrective action or collective response to show that these incidents are not okay, nor will they be tolerated in our spaces. Her ask of the Board is to have policies in place that require examination of whether or not the responses are, in fact working -- so that the burden is not continuing to be placed upon BIPOC students and staff.

Sam Ostrow of Middlebury spoke in support of Esther Charlestin, and expressed his desire to continue the statement that has already been shared: we need to be open to our discomfort and think about how we can do better. We need to talk about it openly with our children and other parents. We each need to take this burden on.

Sepi Aleri of Weybridge shared that she is thinking of Yom Kippur, and how an element of the tradition is to think about how you have harmed others and what you can do to repair the harm. This is essential to the conversation.

Poppy Reese of Middlebury shared her support for Esther. Vermont is progressive in many ways, but not regarding racial issues. It took her leaving Vermont and returning to recognize how delayed this state is. There are a lot of reasons that people might want to move here, but there are also many reasons why they wouldn't -- especially for people of color. We need to acknowledge this. There is a difference between saying everyone is welcome in a building and

actually living and working among others as equals. She would like to know when staff receive anti-racism training, otherwise she will assume they haven't.

Addie Lentzner of Middlebury College spoke again -- and said there is truth to the statement that Vermont has a racist history. We have to talk about it. She implored the Board to examine their own biases, to be proactive and not reactive. Take the initiative to do something before it happens again.

Jason Duquette-Hoffman of Middlebury shared a statement from Joanna Coldwell of Middlebury. She is sad but not surprised. We must have policies in service to teaching the whole community, and not address it like the District addresses other incidents of misbehavior. This is not just misbehavior. Respond to the broader issue. Jason then shared his own Board experience, and the tendency to point to the limitations of Board policy. But these are not the tools we are limited to. There is an opportunity for prevention that has not yet been fulfilled. Please take this opportunity. The Board must also ask how to put accountability structures in place -- and should ask the people who are most affected. We have to engage students and staff.

Greg Akinbiyi shared that he recently moved to Vermont. His wife grew up here and they share a young son. Hearing Esther's story makes him terrified for his son. He recognizes all the different challenges before the Board, especially after hearing the budget presentation, but this is essential work. He hopes his son can attend school here but he is scared.

Mary Slosar of Weybridge spoke again to emphasize the importance of taking on policy work. Passive Boards just accept the policies required by the state -- you really do have the power to create strong policies, and that is the only way to be accountable. She also took the opportunity to speak in support of retaining all the interventionists funded by sunseting ESSER money -- these are needed positions and should be grown.

Justice Elijah, the facilitator hired to assist ACSD with previous equity work spoke in support of Esther. She has lots of big emotions around this. While she appreciates a response from the District, she felt it had the tone of "I have a black friend and this is what we're doing." It didn't sit well. She is writing an Op-Ed in response. She acknowledged that many teachers have been doing the work and have gotten vulnerable when she has done work with the District, but she feels that the emphasis is on action taken rather than acknowledgement of the harm that has been done. This cannot be skipped. She does not see any BIPOC members on the Board, so work must be done to broaden perspectives.

Wei Wei Wong spoke as a representative of a Professionals of Color organization. She noted that this incident is not the first time this has happened in Middlebury. The Board has an opportunity to be a leader in Vermont. She also had questions about whose perspectives are used when even determining whether a racist incident has occurred -- you need a BIPOC perspective to even understand this.

Isabel Gogarty, MUMS teacher and member of the Middlebury Selectboard spoke in support of Esther, noting that Esther is not the only person of color who has left ACSD due to racism. She encouraged Board members to actually go inside of schools to witness what is happening.

Esther Charlestin spoke up briefly to acknowledge Joanna Doria as a Board member who is a person of color, and that she is seen.

At the end of Public Comment period, Ellen Whelan-Wuest thanked Esther Charlestin for her service to the community. The room filled with applause.

I. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Heather Noble
ACSD Board Clerk

Motion to adjourn.

Move: James Malcolm Second: Steve Orzech Status: Passed

Total Meeting Time: 2h 13m

*Public Comment Guidelines:

Public comments are encouraged and welcome at each regular board meeting during the period designated for public comment. Comments are limited to three minutes per person. Citizens will be called to make their statement by the board chair. Public comments regarding personnel, students or legal matters will not be heard by the Board.