

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 625
Saint Paul, Minnesota**

**COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD MEETING
360 Colborne Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102**

**September 14, 2021
4:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Vice Chair Vue.

II. ROLL CALL

Board of Education: J. Vue, J. Foster, J. Kopp, Y. Carrillo, C. Allen

Vice Chair Vue noted that Director Z. Ellis and Director J. Brodrick were not able to attend the meeting and thus would not be part of roll call.

Staff: Superintendent Gothard; C. Long, K. Wilcox-Harris, K. Burns, K. McCarty, K. Thao, C. Baker, S. Grey Akyea, H. Kilgore, M. Doud, A. Collins, J. Turner, M. Schrul, S. Carlstrom, C. Anderson, Y. Vang, M. Langworthy, L. Corey, E. Wacker, J. Vollmer, W. Forbes, M. Hoerth, M. Gilbert Dougherty, B. Hammer

Lynn Golden, SPFE

Public: T. Lonetree, J. Vergis

III. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF THE MAIN AGENDA

MOTION: Director Vue moved approval of the Order of the Agenda. The motion was seconded by Director Allen. It passed by acclaim.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

At the Committee of the Board Meeting on September 14, 2021, Superintendent Gothard welcomed everyone to the meeting, and then provided a brief narrative and recap on the start of the school year like no other, including the successes and excitement among staff and students, as well as the challenges of returning to in-person school at this time. Superintendent Gothard noted that the team continues to support staff to the best of their abilities and he encouraged board members to check in with principals when visiting schools. His own planned visit to the American Indian Magnet School at the end of the week while construction is nearing completion marks an exciting time for the school where things are going really well. He also expressed appreciation for everyone's work to make the successful return of pre-K and kindergarten students to classrooms on Monday possible, with much excitement among busy

students and teachers. Superintendent Gothard emphasized the commitment to health, safety and well-being in the district and the many compliments received about protocols put in place, while also embracing feedback to see if adjustments need to be made.

Questions and discussion from the board included thoughts on district students' adjustment to being back in school again after more than a year of virtual learning; equity concerns for students on the online learning waitlist; and staffing of online learning in the context of uncertainty around vaccine approvals for younger students in the coming months.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

DIRECTOR VUE thanked Superintendent Gothard for his comments and welcome board member questions. Seeing no immediate questions from members of the board, Director Vue began by recounting his experience picking up his son from school and how tired his son was after returning to school, day-after-day, following such a long pause in in-person school. Director Vue asked Superintendent Gothard for his comments on this situation, which everyone is experiencing at the start of this new school year.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD expressed agreement that this year is unusual in the long period of time since school was held in-person and how everyone was adjusting to the new school schedule and pace. He mentioned that some students seem to be comfortable with the pace while others seem to be tired, some are even acting out in the context of all that's new about this school year. He emphasized how important is that the district's staff are dedicating time to focus on social and emotional learning at all times of the school day so they can take a break to discuss what's happening in the classroom, and reflect on what skills are needed to help students be successful in the classroom and build relationships at the same time.

DIRECTOR CARRILLO then asked Superintendent Gothard for more information about the status of online learning enrollment and whether there is a waitlist.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD confirmed that there is a waitlist and that the district would be contacting families on the waitlist in the next several days, likely by early next week, about moving off of the waitlist. He mentioned that it's possible not everyone would be moved off of the waitlist immediately as the district needs to ensure it has the appropriate staffing for both in-person and online learning; the district was still verifying in-person enrollments before moving staff to online teaching. The district is focused on the immediate needs while also considering the unpredictable nature of the virus and vaccine accessibility to younger students, which could reduce the demand for online learning among young students should the vaccine be approved for those students in the coming months. At the moment, the district estimates 1,000 students, or perhaps more, will enroll in online learning.

DIRECTOR CARRILLO followed with a question about students on the waitlist, expressing concerns about their school attendance while on the waitlist.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD responded by noting the district is establishing guidelines for how staff will interact with students on the waitlist, but staff are working hard to ensure students are connected to learning until their final placement is made. He emphasized the care required to balance district-wide needs for in-person and online learning, and how the challenges are different for elementary versus middle school and high school students.

DIRECTOR CARRILLO asked as a follow-up question whether demographic data about students on the waitlist were being collected to help track students on the online waitlist versus in-person schooling to ensure there is equity in the approach. He expressed concerns about balance and pulling teachers away from in-person learning to meet online learning demand and asked what the district is doing to mitigate impacts on in-person school.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD noted that his preference is not to move staff at all but the district is working to develop a process for realigning teachers to ensure staffing is at capacity for both in-person and online learning. Realignment may be made based on seniority, volunteers, or other factors to be determined and the district will prepare reports on this process for future meetings.

DIRECTOR CARRILLO followed up with a question about the vaccine roll-out and the possibility that should the vaccine become available to younger students, demand for online learning could decline over the course of the school year. He asked for clarification whether there is a date by which students can enroll in in-person learning and how the district is planning for this possibility so as to minimize its impact on learning.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD responded by saying the district will be looking very carefully at this possibility and the ways the district can facilitate the shift from online to in-person learning. The district will try to honor the wishes of teachers and students, while emphasizing the impossibility of predicting today what will happen in January. .

DIRECTOR FOSTER concluded the discussion by encouraging board members to get into school buildings to experience the excitement and take note of the challenges of getting back into routines, and how tired people are as a result. She highly recommended everyone get out into the schools.

DIRECTOR VUE, finding no no further questions, closed discussion and asked Superintendent Gothard to introduce the meeting's first presentation on School Finance and Levy.

IV. School Finance and Levy

Superintendent Gothard then noted the importance of the next School Finance and Levy presentation, led by Chief Schrul, who was prepared to walk the board through the levy process in this informational presentation.

This presentation sparked robust dialogue with board members, and included further clarification on the school levy process; the implications of enrollment trends; factors impacting school levies; the impact of Covid-19 on district finances; the need to set a levy ceiling; community input opportunities; and the Truth in Taxation Hearing in December, before Ramsey County's final levy certification filing deadline of December 28, 2021.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

DIRECTOR VUE opened the meeting for discussion among board members. Seeing none, Director Vue asked for clarification on the process for welcoming community input on the board budget process between now and December.

CHIEF SCHRUL responded that the community is welcome to provide input on the process any time between now and December. When community members receive a property tax statement they are informed how to provide feedback. Furthermore, the district will also provide levy updates in October and November and Chief Schrul welcomed the community to reach out to her directly with questions, or to board members. She encouraged community members to reach out.

DIRECTOR ALLEN asked Legislative Liaison Gilbert Dougherty about the revenue formula changes and whether they change every two years.

LEGISLATIVE LIAISON GILBERT DOUGHERTY noted agreement that it's a struggle every two years and that Covid has impacted the ability of the district to project the levy. At this time everything is an estimate. She mentioned through ARP funding there may be a change in funding based on declining enrollment.

DIRECTOR VUE asked board members for additional questions. Noting none, Director Vue closed the discussion and asked Superintendent Gothard to introduce the next presentation on Immunization Noncompliance and Risk for School Exclusion by Director Langworthy.

VI. Immunization Noncompliance and Risk for School Exclusion

The next presentation was the Immunization Compliance and Risk for School Exclusion. Discussion centered on required immunizations in Minnesota (not on Covid specifically) to protect students from preventable diseases; exemptions to the vaccination requirements; impact of Covid-19 on required vaccinations, including data comparing Ramsey County to state of Minnesota vaccination rates; district efforts to reduce barriers to vaccinations through multilingual outreach, translated materials and by providing consistent, equitable and fair access to vaccinations, including the availability of vaccinations at student placement centers, where vaccinations numbers are increasing thanks to active outreach to noncompliant homes; new outreach strategies focused on family outreach rather than individual student outreach, in partnership with mobile clinics and local healthcare providers to support families; and how in order to prevent another preventable disease outbreak on top of Covid-19, Board of Education would be sought for approval of exclusion from school starting with the regular meeting on October 19, 2021, while outreach efforts continue in partnership with community organizations.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

DIRECTOR VUE opened discussion by the board.

DIRECTOR KOPP thanked Director Langworthy for the informative presentation and asked for further clarification about onsite vaccination options and whether the district needs more vaccination access onsite and through community organizations that are closer to home.

CHIEF LANGWORTHY clarified that while onsite vaccinations are not available in every school building, due to budget and staffing constraints, the district is outperforming nearby districts and counties in providing onsite vaccinations and vaccinations through community partner organizations, emphasizing that partnerships are making an impact.

DIRECTOR KOPP thanked Chief Langworthy.

DIRECTOR VUE asked if there were any additional questions. Finding none, Director Vue mentioned his alarm that some 3,000 students have not yet met their vaccination requirements and wondered if there is a light at the end of the tunnel so that a minimum number of students might be excluded from school.

CHIEF LANGWORTHY expressed confidence in her team coming off a strong first week meeting in which they reaffirmed what they needed to stress and focus on in the coming weeks to reach the families and their students in their home languages and clarify where they can receive their vaccines. The district has seen good success and turnout by families thanks to efforts to communicate with families before the start of the school year.

DIRECTOR VUE asked for any further questions. Finding none, Director Vue closed discussion and asked Superintendent Gothard to introduce the next presentation on American Rescue Plan Funding Plan Update.

VI. American Rescue Plan Funding Plan Update

Superintendent Gothard then welcomed Director Carlstrom and Director Kilgore to present the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding Plan Update.

Director Carlstrom and Director Kilgore thanked the board for the opportunity to discuss the federal guidelines about ARP, the process by which ARP proposal was developed in this draft form. They emphasized that the purpose is to get students back to school and to finish unfinished learning, with funding becoming available this current fiscal year through 2024. The emphasis is on evidenced-based interventions and to ensure a safe, clean learning environment, with improved ventilation, mental health services, social/emotional health resources, and more in order to meet community needs. The proposal is an outcome of collaboration among many, including a working group comprising 27 members from across the district -- teachers, administrators, and members of finance, operations, and other teams -- to determine how to match community needs. Families and community advisory groups also provided critical input on this process by providing stakeholder input in collaboration with community conveners and community organizations via targeted virtual meetings. The ideas collected will inform the final proposal content and its implementation. A full report on the ARP proposal, which was still being finalized at the time of the COB meeting, will be provided during the BOE regular meeting on September 21, 2021. Feedback was still being collected through September 17, 2021.

Further clarification was requested regarding input on plan revisions before seeking Board approval of the plan at the September 21, 2021 regular Board meeting; allocation of resources for district priorities such as career and skilled trades training, and social/emotional support; the strategic application of ARP funds to ensure sustainability of the district's efforts; and attention to transparency and communication around ARP spending.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

DIRECTOR VUE opened discussion.

DIRECTOR ALLEN noted several questions, especially regarding community engagement and the role of family and community advisory groups. She asked for clarification about how community engagement works and how families are involved.

DIRECTOR KILGORE responded by saying the district does not put parents to work on behalf of the district, but the district engages with families and family groups in different ways depending on the group. For example, the Somali PAC has a very active WhatsApp group through which the Somali PAC was engaged. She mentioned PACS are core conveners for the family and community feedback process. C

DIRECTOR ALLEN expressed concern that the people struggling the most are the people who have the least time to engage in committees and groups. These are the people who feel the most isolated, which is concerning. She asked for more information about different schools having different needs based on what data or criteria collected through this process.

DIRECTOR KILGORE responded by thanking Director Allen for this feedback and mentioned that they are always seeking to improve their toolbox.

DIRECTOR CARLSTROM added that if there are additional needs, and social work help, they will work to make improvements to tailor their work to meet those needs.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD mentioned that the district wants to avoid creating redundancies.

DIRECTOR ALLEN emphasized the need for social and emotional support to develop a sense of safety in schools especially at this time.

DIRECTOR CARLSTROM said they were just discussing this same thing earlier in the day about how different schools may have different needs. There is a need to focus on school context when giving guardrails to schools.

DIRECTOR ALLEN emphasized the need to consider how district can make school fun, asking how does the district bring people back into school spaces at this time -- a time of trauma? There is a critical need to create joy in schools as fundamental to social and emotional support. Laughter is important. Director Allen stressed the importance of changing the school atmosphere so there is less stress as you move through the building. She concluded by expressing thanks for this work.

DIRECTOR CARRILLO then asked for more information about funding for career development relative to support for students interested in trades and skilled labor. That is, support for students who are not interested in college and seek high quality jobs. As a concerned citizen, Director Carrillo asked for a more imaginative approach to student pathways post-high school and support of students who seek high quality jobs. He said that while things could change in five years, the availability of funds now means the district should do it now.

DIRECTOR CARLSTROM responded by saying while they did not highlight the "earn-to-learn" program, it is part of this proposal. It is not just college focused.

DIRECTOR CARRILLO encouraged the group to be more creative and to consider creating something new, with more imagination.

DIRECTOR FOSTER then spoke, adding emphasis to Director Carrillo's comments about increasing job certifications and internship opportunities and furthering the trades programs the district is proud of. She highlighted the work being done to introduce trades to students earlier in their school, assign mentors in schools who represent positions and people from across the district to showcase the work they do, as well as the need to educate the community about what the district is doing. She mentioned the district could do more to collect and share data about students who are graduating with dual credit, participating in internships, among other opportunities.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD added that during his tenure a key part of the district's strategic plan has been to provide high quality internships that lead, for example, to jobs in technology. There is room to tell the district's stories more and better.

DIRECTOR CARLSTROM followed up by adding that \$7M has been set aside for community partnerships -- which may be an opportunity for growing this type of programming.

DIRECTOR VUE then asked for more information about what the district's Innovation Office does.

CHIEF BAKER responded with information that the Innovation Office helps the district make just-in-time changes, to make fast change, supporting and building systems to implement and see results. He then deferred to Director Corey of the Innovation Office.

DIRECTOR COREY started by noting that she has been in her role for three months and that the mandate of the Innovation Office is to work cross-functionally to make sure the district can do justice and be good stewards of ARP money. The Innovation Office is analyzing how best to track activities and outcomes and that more information will be coming in a few months.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD noted that ARP funds are a good problem to have and a significant responsibility. Therefore, the district has a team dedicated to its disbursement who have an eye on the universe to help the district connect. Their critical eyes are very important for helping the district determine how well things are going, keeping himself and Chief Baker informed. SPPS continues to innovate and the Innovation Office helps to track how the district is making change.

CHIEF BAKER stressed the importance of the sustainability of these efforts and of the system as a whole. The district needs to have the capacity to continue the work once ARP funding is spent and to seek consistency.

DIRECTOR KOPP then asked a progress monitoring question and how the public will be able to follow proposals and do some tracking.

DIRECTOR COREY responded by saying the Innovation Office will provide transparent access to ARP spending information to the Board of Education and to the wider public.

DIRECTOR KOPP agreed how important communication is and her interest in participating in those conversations.

DIRECTOR FOSTER reminded everyone that these are one-time funds and the need to connect them to the strategic plan so that by the end of 2023 and 2024 programs the district has a plan to sustain the innovations for the community and to ensure the schools are world class.

SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD stated that he could not imagine working with this amount of funds without a plan and the district has a plan and the people to carry out the plan and to provide resources to intensify practices that work. He emphasized that it's not a time for experimentation but rather a time to strengthen what works well. Or, if the district determines something is not working, then the district will discontinue those. It's possible there may be some things that the district will no longer do.

DIRECTOR VUE then asked for clarification of the roles of the Working Group and the Advisory Group and how they differ.

DIRECTOR CARLSTROM explained that the Working Group is a district-based, school-based group, while the Advisory Group is made up of parents and community members.

DIRECTOR VUE then asked how the board should understand their roles.

DIRECTOR CARLSTROM noted that their roles are to uncover needs, as advisors to herself and to others on the team. Director Carlstrom noted that the hope is the Advisory Group will say: "You've missed something -- what about college and careers!" Meanwhile the Working Group, which works with priorities set by the Advisory Group, submits proposals to the Minnesota Department of Education to receive funding to meet those priorities. The Working Group determines how the district will evaluate whether a proposal will accomplish what it sets out to do. For example, if the Working Group comes up with a proposal, but the BOE raises concerns about the proposal's ramifications -- it's necessary to determine how needs will be met through that proposal. The process helps the district ask hard questions and recalibrate proposals and make them effective.

DIRECTOR VUE then mentioned his understanding that the survey closed on September 10th and wondered whether they had any survey results to share now.

DIRECTOR KILGORE responded that among preliminary findings by theme, stakeholders across staff and community find that the district is doing pretty well, but they seek more information about impact. Another theme is that some investments are too low -- similar to questions raised during today's meeting -- regarding social and emotional learning, for example. She noted the Working Group was digging through the feedback now and that the full report would be available as soon as finished.

DIRECTOR VUE, finding no further questions, closed discussion.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Director Vue moved to adjourn the meeting. Director Allen seconded the motion. It passed by acclaim.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

For clarity and to facilitate research, these minutes reflect the order of the original Agenda and not necessarily the time during the meeting the items were discussed.

Prepared and submitted by:

Brian Hammer
Interim Board Secretary, St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education