

BOARD OF EDUCATION
Minutes for January 22, 2024

The Maryville Board of Education met in a regular session at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, January 22 at Foothills Elementary School. Board members present were Julie Elder, Nick Black, Isaac Simerly, Candy Morgan, and Bart Stinnett. Chair Julie Elder called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and asked for a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Jibryil Delaney, Naomi Weatherbee, Jimmy Hill, Keith Hughes, and Jase McMillian.

UPDATE FROM FOOTHILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FHE Assistant Principal Rob Hensley welcomed guests and expressed his and the students' enthusiasm for returning to school after four snow days. He introduced teachers Mrs. Patelle and Ms. Walker, along with their students, who performed the Secret Stories Alphabet Song.

Mr. Hensley expressed his gratitude for the teachers and staff at FHE, extending thanks to the Board for its support, as well as Dr. Mike Winstead and Mrs. Amy Vagnier. During his presentation, Mr. Hensley provided a brief "pulse check" of Foothills Elementary, highlighting the inclusive playground equipment, Secret Story reading curriculum, and additional upgrades to benefit students. Principal Karen Schito and Mr. Hensley attributed FHE's success to autonomy, an "all kids can learn" mentality, a focus on relationships, among others. He shared that students are excited to be at school, and Foothills Elementary will continue to give its personal best and nothing less.

Bart Stinnett expressed his gratitude to Mrs. Patelle and Ms. Walker for their work with students. He also thanked Mrs. Schito and Mr. Hensley for their leadership.

Isaac Simerly thanked Mrs. Patelle and Ms. Walker for their students' performance. He remarked that FHE is a special school and thanked Mr. Hensley and Mrs. Schito for their service to students and teachers at Foothills Elementary.

Nick Black thanked Mrs. Schito and Mr. Hensley, along with the wonderful Foothills Elementary staff. He shared his own children were excited to return to school after four snow days. He expressed his appreciation for the school's focus on literacy and instilling a love for reading in his fourth-grade student.

Candy Morgan thanked Mrs. Patelle and Ms. Walker for their work with students and serving their individual needs. She stated the performance was phenomenal. Mrs. Morgan commented on the new playground equipment and the school's commitment to continuous improvement.

Julie Elder stated that Mrs. Patelle and Ms. Walker should be very proud of their students, remarking on the pride and enjoyment on the students' faces during their performance.

ADOPT AGENDA

Julie Elder asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Nick Black moved to adopt, and a second came from Bart Stinnett. The motion was adopted unanimously.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON AGENDA ITEMS

Dustin Park wished the board a happy School Board Appreciation Week before commenting on Agenda Item 1. Mr. Park shared he is a Maryville resident with three students enrolled in Maryville City Schools. He specifically focused on the second section of “free and appropriate education for all, including students with disabilities.” Mr. Park stated the proposed law discriminates against the most vulnerable students, as non-public schools are not required to abide by the law. Mr. Park stated that in Maryville City Schools, every student is supported and given what they need to succeed. He expressed his desire to send a clear message by approving the resolution and sharing that Maryville City Schools values public education for all students.

APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

Isaac Simerly made the motion to approve the consent agenda. Nick Black seconded the motion. The motion carried with full agreement.

1. Approve Minutes of December 18, 2023, meeting (Attachment)
2. Approve changes to Board policy section 5.301 (Emergency and Legal Leave) and 6.3041 (Title IX and Sexual Harassment) Second Reading (Attachment A1)
3. Approve Maryville High School Orchestra overnight trip to Gatlinburg, Tennessee to attend ETSBOA Senior Clinic – Funding Source: student (Attachment A2)
4. Approve Maryville High School Swim & Dive Team overnight trip to Nashville, Tennessee to attend state championships – Funding Source: Athletic Department (Attachment A3)
5. Approve Maryville High School Track & Field overnight trip to Birmingham, Alabama to compete in a track meet – Funding Source: Track Account (Attachment A4)

AGENDA

1. Consider a joint resolution between Alcoa City Schools, Alcoa Board of Commissioners, and Maryville City Council opposing the adoption and implementation of The Education Freedom Scholarship Act (Attachment B1)
 - Motion made by Bart Stinnett. Second from Candy Morgan.
 - Dr. Winstead provided insights into the joint resolution, revealing that Blount County’s Board of Education plans to propose a similar resolution in February. He expressed the view that it’s not essential to have a comprehensive understanding of all components of The Education Freedom Scholarship Act, stating that Tennessee seems to be following a pattern seen in other states, with the end result being no income caps or caps on the number of students, making vouchers accessible to every student in every system. Dr. Winstead asserted that The Education Freedom Scholarship Act is detrimental to the very students it maintains to assist. He reiterated that the needs of students in Maryville City, Alcoa City, and Blount County are better addressed without the proposed vouchers.
 - Nick Black mentioned that the Board addressed this issue in 2019, with Mr. Park also speaking at that time. He stated the Maryville City Schools Board of Education opposed it then, and their position remains unchanged. Black expressed his confusion regarding arguments supporting vouchers and his frustration with an attempt to merely change the name to push it through again.

He emphasized that public funds should not be diverted to private entities, stating, “the dollars we have are scarce, and we put them to good use.” Despite media claims that schools are averse to competition, Mr. Black asserted that Maryville City Schools is open to competing with any entity, emphasizing the importance of funding for existing students. Mr. Black said he was moved by Mr. Park’s comment on the most vulnerable student populations being targeted. He criticized The Education of Freedom Scholarship Act, deeming it a for-profit initiative, and challenged the notion that student achievement has increased in any state as a result. Reiterating his strong opposition, Mr. Black firmly stated his stance against the Act.

- Candy Morgan concurred that tonight’s meeting is not the first time the Board has addressed a conversation around vouchers. She recalled that as early as 2015, MCS educated the public on this matter. Mrs. Morgan acknowledged that a motive does exist and affirmed that Maryville City Schools is prepared for the challenge. However, she pointed out that there are districts across the state that lack affluence, emphasizing the need to safeguard those students at the state level. She stressed the importance of investing funds into hiring strong teachers and prioritizing professional development statewide. She firmly stated her belief that vouchers have no place in Maryville or in education in general, asserting that diverting public dollars away from public education is unacceptable. As school board members, she emphasized the Boards responsibility to protect public funds.
- Julie Elder read a statement she prepared in opposition to The Education of Freedom Scholarship Act (document attached).
- Isaac Simerly voiced his frustration that the discussion of The Education of Freedom Scholarship Act has progressed without any state-provided details. He recommended that any implementation of vouchers should encompass all income-eligible students and include transportation, restricting it to failing districts. Simerly stated that taxpayers should not be subsidizing private schools and emphasized the necessity of oversight, accountability, and transparency in the process. He urged Maryville City Schools and Alcoa City Schools to use their political influence and take a firm stand. Mr. Simerly concluded by expressing gratitude to Dr. Winstead and Mrs. Vagnier for their leadership.
- Bart Stinnett stated that public education is one of the pillars the United States was built on. He shared his concern about the lack of teacher requirements and metrics.
- Motion approved unanimously

2. Consider FY24 Budget Amendment #2 (Attachment B2)

- Motion made by Nick Black. Second from Isaac Simerly.
- Dr. Winstead explained the FY24 Budget Amendment changed slightly from when the Board last met because of new TISA dollars. The postponement of the January meeting, due to inclement weather, provided an opportunity to make changes.
- Sarah Pritchard, Finance Director, shared the following:
 - This budget amendment will be an overall increase to all school funds (GP, Café, Federal, and Adventure Club).
 - GENERAL PURPOSE
 - We are capturing an increase of \$563k in General Purpose.
 - We received the outcomes portion of TISA totaling 642k (part of which has been captured already), as well as a fast growth stipend of \$76k. Additionally, we received a State special education pre-school grant of \$80k, and public school security grant of \$231k.
 - CAFEETERIA

- The \$256k increase in cafeteria funds is due to a supply chain grant of \$140k, an equipment grant of \$36k (for the JSE freezer), and an increase in LGIP interest.
 - ADVENTURE CLUB
 - For the \$1M increase in adventure club funds: we are receiving a third round of the childcare stabilization grant totaling \$381k. We are requesting a use of fund balance of \$656k. A lot of revenue from the grants last year went to fund balance. We will distribute remaining profits to schools.
 - FEDERAL FUNDS
 - Federal funds reflect an overall increase of \$241k due to new and reallocated State and Federal dollars for FY24:
 - \$4,549 for Title I, \$45,567 for Title III (reallocated from another district who did not spend them down – FY22 funds), \$190k for IDEA Part B, and \$1,434 for Idea PreK.
 - If approved, this \$2M overall increase in revenue will go to the City Council on February 6th for their approval.
- Nick Black thanked Mrs. Pritchard for the summary and for her attendance at tonight’s meeting.
- Bart Stinnett also thanked Mrs. Pritchard for all she does for Maryville City Schools.
- Motion approved unanimously

3. Consider changes to Board Policy Section 2.200 – (Annual Operating Budget) (Attachment B3)

- Motion made by Isaac Simerly. Second from Candy Morgan.
- MCS Finance Director Sarah Pritchard explained that the TN Comptroller of the Treasury has issued guidance that local legislative bodies have the option to adopt a resolution allowing the TN Dept of Education to be the approving authority for all budgets of the School Federal Projects Fund, thus dismissing further approval by the school board.
- Dr. Winstead added that carryover funds are sometimes pulled from another district, and the deadline to spend these funds doesn’t always allow time for approval from both our Board and City Council. This change to policy will allow MCS to capture reallocated funds and put them directly into ePlan.
- Isaac Simerly asked a clarifying question about items for preapproval, and Dr. Winstead explained that reallocations would only be added to the revenue side of the budget.
- Motion approved unanimously

4. Consider bus proposal through Sourcewell - Funding Source: FY25 Transportation Equipment - \$141,192.98 (Attachment B4)

- Motion made by Candy Morgan. Second from Nick Black.
- Dr. Winstead explained this will be the District’s third bus purchase, replacing the fleet of Special Education buses as they expire due to mileage or years of use. The lead time is approximately ten months to one year, so the funds will be captured in next year’s budget. 60% of the funds will be from IDEA, with the remaining 40% from the District’s transportation budget. Approving this purchase now will allow the order to be placed.
- Motion approved unanimously

REPORTS FROM THE DIRECTOR OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Winstead expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the Maintenance team, administrators, and day porters for preparing the campuses for students after the snow. Despite the cold temperatures and lingering snow in some areas, 93% of students were in attendance. Dr. Winstead shared that questions regarding the remaining number of snow days and management of additional days will be communicated with parents in the next District Update. The 2023-2024 school calendar includes five built-in snow days, and four of those days have been used. If the remaining day needs to be used, days six and seven will be remote days, as TN allows us to use two remote learning days per semester. If an eighth day is necessary, Dr. Winstead shared he would return to the Board to discuss options that avoid impacting spring break.

Dr. Winstead provided an update on the Centegix system, sharing that boxes have been installed at all the schools and training will begin next week.

Maria Greene provided the following update on One Book Blitz:

We are excited to kick off One Book Blitz 2024 along with Alcoa City Schools and Blount County Schools. Over 8,500 K-5 students in all 3 school systems will receive a copy of the book, a bookmark, highlighter, a free kids meal card from Chick-fil-A, a scavenger hunt card, and a reading calendar. This year, we were able to purchase the books locally from Neighborly Books, and we are grateful for their support and generosity. Although many businesses in the community support One Book Blitz in a variety of ways, I would like to acknowledge our Platinum Sponsors: Alcoa City Schools Foundation, Clayton Homes, and Maryville City Schools Foundation. Gold Sponsor: First Horizon. Silver Sponsors: Blount County Education Foundation, Denso, and Arconic. Bronze Sponsor: Smoky Mountain Pediatric Dentistry.

In honor of Tennessee School Board Appreciation Week, Dr. Winstead thanked each board member for his or her service to the school system and their support as a cohesive group through both the good and challenging times.

RECOGNITION OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

Coulter Grove: We would like to recognize Julie Vananda, CGIS CDC teacher (and all the other staff volunteers) for leading, organizing and running the recent blood drive and race on the CGIS campus to benefit Molly Rader and her family. Molly's Mile raised over \$22,000 to benefit Molly and her family, and this amount does not include the proceeds raised from tshirt sales. Final numbers from the blood drive are not available yet. Molly celebrated her 12th birthday Saturday in the hospital, and we are grateful that she is slowly, but surely, getting better. If anyone would still like to purchase a tshirt, they are on sale this week at MHS.

Maryville Junior High School: Congratulations to MJHS STEM teacher Andy Herbert for securing a \$3500 grant from TVA. He plans to use the money to purchase Vex pneumatics kits for his classroom.

COMMENTS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Bart Stinnett stated he was impressed with the student presentation and expressed his enthusiasm for the new playground equipment.

Isaac Simerly shared that his son loves the new playground equipment, specifically the merry-go-round. He conveyed his anger over Tennessee's potentially declining federal funds, suggesting that such an action could constitute an immediate violation of the 14th Amendment. He also brought up the recent change in grading systems for schools as a way to perpetuate the 3rd grade retention law. Despite only serving on the Board for a year, he expressed a feeling that someone has it out for public schools.

Candy Morgan stated that in the time she has spent with legislatures, she feels like they “just don’t get it.” Unfortunately, these battles will continue. She stated that it was a great first day back to school after extended snow days, and she thanked the administrators and those who arrived on campus early to prepare for students.

Nick Black shared that the blood drive and race for Molly Rader was inspiring. He expressed his hopes and prayers for her recovery. In reference to school vouchers, Mr. Black questioned how someone now under federal indictment and a crook is able to push through an agenda.

Julie Elder said that Dr. Winstead and Becky Stone did a great job at last week’s meeting regarding Tennessee’s rejection of federal funding. She stated that she feels like public schools are being spit upon. She expressed her appreciation for Julie Vananda and shared she enjoyed hearing from the students tonight and Mr. Hensley’s presentation. She said that Maryville always has a can-do attitude, regardless of the situation.

Meeting adjourned at 6:32

Respectfully submitted by: Maria Greene

Attachment: Statement from Julie Elder regarding Agenda Item 1

I firmly believe and agree with Governor Lee that parents always know best when it comes to deciding what form of education is best for their child. Parents already have the choice of public, homeschool, private, in-person, on-line, school transfer, etc.

What I cannot support is the expansion of a pilot project having only operated for less than two years, and during that time produced less than desirable test results. Or, as Education Commissioner Lizette Reynolds stated to the Tennessee Senate, the test results were “Nothing to write home about.”

So much discussion has centered around the funding dollars, and how this expansion may affect school systems. My question is how will this really benefit the students and families Governor Lee claims the expansion is designed for in 2025, when he proposes all income restrictions be lifted and the voucher be available to any student state-wide.

First, if a child and his family seek to use a voucher at a private school, the family must go through the admission process, and the private school has the right to admit or deny admission. The school has the choice. If the school does admit the child, they are not required to provide transportation. And, as far tuition, \$7,000 will only begin to cover the cost. In our area, Webb, CAK, CBA are all well over \$10,000 in tuition alone.

Universal vouchers, meaning vouchers available to any child regardless of income, that are already available in a few states, are proving to simply be tuition subsidies for wealthy families whose children already attend private school. Plainly put: A wealthy family would be using our public tax dollars to get a rebate on private school tuition. Seventy percent of Florida children awarded new vouchers this academic year were already attending private schools last year. Eighteen percent were brand new kindergartners, and only 13% of recipients in Florida had actually previously attended a public school. Iowa’s newly expanded program saw about 60% of students receiving vouchers were already attending private schools. Last year, the Arizona education department [reported that 75 percent of students](#) who applied for the state’s universal ESA program had never attended public school.

I won’t even begin to get into the idea that the private schools where the public tax dollars may go might not be held to the same testing, transparency, and accountability that public school systems must provide.

Governor Lee has stated the cost for the proposed Education Freedom Scholarship Act would come from the Tennessee General Fund and not affect TISA funding. The 20,000 scholarships’ price tag of \$141 million is substantial, considering the state’s revenue is no longer what we saw a few years ago, and forecasts are not favorable.

We want our representatives in the general assembly to understand that we, as Alcoa and Maryville, utilize our funding to provide a strong education for any child that attends our

schools. We need our state politicians to look away from out-of-state money and influence, and focus on Tennessee's children.