

MINUTES



**Addison Central School District
ACSD Board
Board Meeting
Monday, March 25, 2024, 6:30 pm - 8:45 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 Attendance

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

A. Call to Order Upon Reaching A Quorum

Barb Wilson

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Others present:

Sophia Lawton, Student Rep to the Board

ACSD Staff: Tim Williams, Interim Superintendent; Nicole Carter, Assistant Superintendent and Director of Equity and Student Services; Courtney Krahn, Director of Teaching & Learning; Matt Corrente, Director of Finance & Operations; Jen Kravitz, Principal of Mary Hogan School; Tracey Harrington, Special Education Director; Laura Nugent, Special Education Director

Note: Several Mary Hogan Teachers also present

1. Introductions - Board Members, Administrators and Staff

B. Public Comment on Agenda Items

Mary Slosar of Weybridge made a statement to express her hope that the Board engages in a meaningful conversation about how it is hiring and retaining staff. There is clearly a shortage, and staff retention is a critical issue.

C. Recommendation to Approve Minutes of 3/11/2024

Barb Wilson

Motion to approve the minutes of March 11, 2024

Move: Jason Chance Second: Suzanne Buck Status: Passed

D. Approve ACSD Bills

James Malcolm

James Malcolm presented a summary of the bills (read by himself and Jason Chance on March 18, 2024):

Payroll: \$702,130.37

General Fund: \$549,782.66 -- ~ \$200K of this is payment to preschool operators for universal PreK (the 3rd of 4th payments)

Motion to approve and pay ACSD bills as presented.

Move: James Malcolm Second: Suzanne Buck Status: Passed

E. Report of the Student Representatives

Eddie Fallis
Sophia Lawton

Sophia Lawton reported that MUHS is celebrating Neurodiversity Week -- T-shirts have been ordered and are on the way.

She noted that some MUHS students have organized around concerns about the new dress code, particularly some rules about attire for females. Several male students have also brought concerns regarding privacy in boy's restroom to the administration's attention. They would like to see barriers/walls to provide some privacy between urinals/fixtures and the door/hallway view.

Sophia also thanked those who participated in the Hope Happens Here trivia night -- it was a huge success.

F. Report of the Superintendent

Tim Williams

1. Student Services Presentation

Nicole Carter

Nicole Carter provided a presentation on the structure of Student Services, critical needs/lack of staffing, and the impact it is having on student behavior in some of our ACSD schools. She began the presentation with a reminder that: 1) kids want to do well, 2) students who struggle with behavioral issues often do so because they do not have the skills to succeed in their environment (are overwhelmed and behavior is how they communicate their need); and 3) the goal of student services is to help these students build their skills to succeed.

Summary of Part 1 of presentation included in meeting materials:

Degree of student proficiency/need determines the level of intervention & services, ranging from least restrictive whole classroom setting with no intervention (Tier I) to most restrictive Residential Education for significant needs. There is a severe lack of staffing in Vermont for students with significant need, and throughout Addison County, many districts are also having trouble staffing positions that serve students on IEP and 504 plans (e.g., special educators, speech pathologists, mental health providers, etc.). Federal law requires prioritizing services for these students, which means it falls on classroom teachers and administrators to do this work -- which then impacts the classroom experience.

Current problem solving efforts in ACSD:

- Prioritizing most intensive needs
- Virtual services

- using local school capacity to shift students
- Building Multi-Tiered Systems to increase intervention capacity
- staff training
- partnering with ANWSD and MAUSD for the ACP to serve students who require an alternative learning environment

There is ACP space for Middle and High School Students, but no program/not enough capacity for elementary students with intense needs. The Wellness and Learning Center at Mary Hogan provides an in-school service environment for these students. ACSD needs more capacity, and is looking to expand the program in wither Mary Hogan or in Ripton, where there is administrator/teacher interest in providing the services. The bottom line: ACSD is working to respond to the significant need while dealing with significant staffing shortages in this area. Behavior disruption is leading to lost learning for all students.

Board Questions:

Jamie McCallum asked Nicole a question about how educators know if the behavior is a lack of skills problem and when it's something else. This idea of lagging skills is somewhat controversial What is a skilled child compared to an unskilled child? It seems too simplistic. Nicole responded she would not call a child an unskilled child, but that there may be reasons (neurobiological, neurodivergence, experience in environment, trauma, etc.) that some kids lag behind on certain skills they need to succeed in a classroom environment. It's very child-specific, and the idea is to help support children who need accommodations and assistance developing the skills they need to succeed in their learning environment.

Joanna Doria asked about which skills are being quantified for proficiency. Nicole said she would be happy to share the skill-based framework in education -- but that it's also an attempt to move away from categorizing students by their disability/trauma and looking instead at what skill areas they need support in. Examples: persistence, distress tolerance, self-advocacy, etc.

Ellie Romp asked about skills verses basic needs, such as hunger or safety. Nicole agreed that this is an extremely important area/consideration.

Summary of Part 2 of the Presentation:

Nicole Carter presented some data on behavioral incidents in ACSD, based on their new Educlimber software. It includes data from August 2023 through Feb/March 2024. The administration is looking at patterns to identify priority areas that will help inform decision-making around student support services. She provided a general definition for Minor (disrespect, skipping class/absenteeism, cursing, other disruptions) and Major incidents (fighting, violence, threats of violence, unsafe behavior, etc), and shared graphs and bar charts for district-wide and some school-specific data. Highlights:

District-wide Major Incidents: 333

District-wide Minor Incidents: 839

Highest incidence rate in January 2024

Mary Hogan highest number in the District at 500 total incidents

MUHS and MUMS at 384 and 315 total incidents, respectively

Of note: Mary Hogan accounts for 20% of students but much higher percentage of District incidents

The 20 most disruptive students range from 41 to 12 incidents per student in the August-

March timeframe.

Minor incidents: most frequent, generally happening/handled in class. 283 at MUHS, 280 at Mary Hogan, and 234 at MUMS. Most occurring in 1st grade, then 9th, 8th, 10th, and 6th grades, respectively.

Major incidents: Fighting/aggression 168, Dangerous 182 at Mary Hogan, 80 at MUMS, and 48 at MJHS. Most occurring in 1st grade, followed by Kindergarten, 2nd, 7th and 6th grades.

Board questions:

Mary Heather Noble asked if other Addison County districts have been collecting the same data, and if, so what their numbers look like. Nicole wasn't sure, but recalled that Mt. Abe is using Educlimber, so might be, Mary Heather also requested that Part of 2 of the presentation slides be shared with the Board.

Ellie Romp asked about the likelihood of under-reported incidents. This was acknowledged.

Jamie McCallum asked what needs to happen for an incident to be "counted" -- it must be documented and submitted to administration for it to have been entered into Educlimber.

Part 3 of the presentation: Strategies ACSD can implement

Nicole Carter continued with a summary of the work that ACSD is currently doing to address the problems in light of the circumstances. ongoing work includes; more specialized staffing; using community-based mental health supports (CSAC); developing additional programming and placement options (WLC and ACP); problem-solving with other districts (ACP), and continue collaboration with CSAC for creative supports.

Board Comments/Questions:

Joanna Doria asked Nicole if she was saying there was a direct correlation between poor behavior and lack of skills. Nicole disagreed with the characterization and re-iterated her response to Jamie McCallum's question. In general, behavior is communication that is conveying a student's inability to thrive in a particular setting. She what skills are needed to improve a student's ability to thrive depends on the student. She can't talk about specifics in a school board presentation. Students may have teams with professionals working to identify what specifically a student struggles with and which skill building efforts may help to remediate that. There is a tendency to talk about a student in terms of pathology, rather than what supports they may need to develop the skills that will help them thrive.

Ellen Whelan-Wuest asked Nicole to return to the data illustrating incidents by school, wondering if discontinuing the Response Coordinator position at Mary Hogan might make a bad situation worse.

Steve Orzech noted that a lot of people would probably want to see these numbers, and asked whether the data could be further distilled without identifying students.

Barb Wilson noted the importance of incorporating the data into Strategic Plan implementation.

Mary Heather Noble asked about the proportionality of incidents caused by students on plans -- would this be an indicator of their needs are not being met? She asked if other schools

across the district are tracking incidents -- are they not having them, or just not collecting data? She wondered about the relative disruption to a larger class, in which a teacher may not have the bandwidth to adequately address the behavior. She suggested getting anecdotal data from teachers who have taught in both Mary Hogan and other ACSD rural schools.

Ellen Whelan-Wuest also noted the importance of anecdotal data. She wondered about the new WLC being proposed, and why Ripton was selected as a potential location. Is it because of the available space there? Nicole explained that Ripton's principal is skilled in this issue and is passionate about wanting to help the program be successful. The staffing there also have the experience to add to the program.

Jason Chance asked about plans for Mary Hogan for the remainder of the year as well as the 24-25 academic year. Tim Williams responded that the administration is working with building principals to discuss options that can work. Some of those options include moving students to different buildings and increasing the capacity of the elementary school WLC.

Suzanne Buck asked about the monthly data and wondered if the spike in January incidents was related to the holiday break.

Joanna Doria asked if the ultimate goal is to move students to the least restrictive environment. Nicole clarified that Federal law requires special education students to be placed in the least restrictive environment commensurate with their needs -- this is to undo decades of seclusion practices with special needs children.

Laura Harthan noted the importance of having other ACSD school utilize Educlimber and generate similar data so we can have a better sense of ACSD-wide needs. Barb Wilson agreed that the Board would benefit from returning to this data & discussion when additional information is gathered and analyzed.

2. Action: Approve Faculty/Staff Appointments/Resignations/Retirements

Tim Williams presented the list of ACSD appointments, resignations, and retirements to the Board.

Board Questions:

Joanna Doria asked if any exit interviews were being conducted. Tim Williams said that there are now. There had not been any done in the past, but they are occurring now.

Jason Chance asked if any of the new appointments will be directed to serve urgent needs at Mary Hogan school. Tim Williams responded that one of the paraprofessionals will be directed there.

James Malcolm noted that the Board did not used to be involved in approving hires, so it is difficult to know what turnover has been like in the past.

Barb Wilson suggested that it might be beneficial for the Board to hear the results of the exit interviews. Tim Williams noted that that information would need to be conducted in Executive Session as a personnel matter.

Motion to approve the appointments, resignations, and retirements presented in Agenda Items F.2(a-k) of the March 25, 2024 agenda.

Note: Laura Harthan and Suzanne Buck abstained.

Move: Jamie McCallum Second: Steve Orzech Status: Passed

- a. Appoint Ryan Furmanchin as a Custodian, 1.0 FTE, Step 9 of the support staff agreement
 - b. Appoint Dustin Hunt as Activities Director, 1.0 FTE, Non-Union position
 - c. Appoint Megan Matas as a Paraprofessional, 1.0 FTE, Step 5 of the support staff agreement
 - d. Appoint Taylor Miller as a Paraprofessional, 1.0 FTE, Step 3 of the support staff agreement
 - e. Appoint Jenna Ouellette as a Paraprofessional, 1.0 FTE, Step 1 of the support staff agreement
 - f. Accept Resignation of Skyler Ambrose, Individuals and Societies Teacher, 1.00 effective 6/30/2024
 - g. Accept Resignation of David Anderson, Special Educator, 1.00 effective 6/30/2024
 - h. Accept Resignation of Matthew Brankman, Principal, 1.00 effective 6/30/2024
 - i. Accept Resignation of Eliana Canas Parra, World Language Teacher, 0.6 effective 6/30/2024
 - j. Accept Resignation of Anna Hand, Health/PE Teacher, 1.00 effective 4/1/2024
 - k. Accept Resignation of Tracie Taylor, Paraprofessional, 1.00 effective 3/14/24
3. Action: Bank Account Resolution and Invoice Payment Authorization Matthew Corrente

Matt Corrente presented the Board resolution documents to (a.) grant standard banking powers to fiscal officers throughout the District; and (b.) define and grant authorization powers to members of the Board to act on Director's orders.

James Malcolm made a motion to adopt the Board Resolution to authorize any two board members to review, authorize payment, and sign directors' orders as needed when the School Board does not meet on a regularly scheduled invoice payment approval date; and authorize the Treasurer to sign checks for necessary/urgent school payments as recommended by the ACSD Director of Finance and Operations or Superintendent of Schools between regularly scheduled invoice payment dates. The Board of Directors will ratify the approval of necessary payments at their next regularly scheduled board meeting by approving all payments made since the last regularly scheduled invoice payment date. Audit reports will be delivered to all Board members.

Suzanne Buck seconded. No further discussion. Barb Wilson called the vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Joanna Doria made a motion to adopt the Board Resolution to authorize ACSD staff occupying designated Position Titles (i.e., Superintendent/Director of Finance and Operations/Assistant Business Manager and other positions specified in the Resolution document) to exercise the following activities on behalf of ACSD:

Open or close deposit or share accounts in the name of the organization; endorse checks and orders for payment or otherwise withdraw or transfer funds on deposit; borrow money on behalf of the organization; enter into a written lease for the purpose of renting, maintaining, accessing and terminating a Safe Deposit box; execute various bank agreements, wire transfer agreements, ACH agreements, Night Depository agreements, and Merchant Processing Agreements; sign, execute, and deliver documents as needed for the above items; inquire about balances in accounts, and provide financial institution with names of persons occupying positions for signature changes.

Laura Harthan seconded. No discussion ensued. Barb Wilson called the vote and the motion passed unanimously.

G. Report of the Chair Barb Wilson

1. Ethics Declaration Barb Wilson

Barb Wilson passed around copies of the VSBA Ethics Declaration for all Board members to sign, and took a moment to specifically remind all members about the legal and ethical obligation to maintain confidentiality and attend board and committee meetings.

2. Board Retreat Update Barb Wilson

Barb Wilson reported that she has talked with Dr. Baker about scheduling a Board retreat. Dr. Baker is hoping to get some work done with the Strategic Plan Implementation Team before the retreat, so has suggested holding it on Saturday, June 1st. Barb advised all to mark their calendars. She noted that some of the retreat will cover governance topics, and the rest of the time will be spent on strategic plan implementation.

Barb also suggested setting up a Google form to get suggestions from Board members on priority governance topics to cover at the retreat.

H. Report of the Board

1. Committee Assignments Barb Wilson

Barb Wilson reminded the Board that committee assignments have been sent via email. She stressed the Executive Committee's methodology to keep committees balanced with representation from both Middlebury and surrounding towns, as well as make sure each committee has an experienced Board member.

She requested that Committees schedule their first meetings to elect Committee Chairs, and then review their committee charge and create a work plan for the year. She hopes the Finance Committee will work on setting some general parameters around budgeting for FY26 earlier than Sept/Oct.

I. Public Comment - Any Topic

Mary Slosar of Weybridge expressed her original intent to make a comment about Neurodiversity Week as part of the Addison County SEPAC, but that she instead felt compelled to comment as a parent after listening to Nicole Carter's Student Services presentation. She expressed anger and shock that, in the wake of Neurodiversity Week, the District would reinforce the idea that student's behavior is due to a lack of skill. Her autistic daughter is not lacking skill, she has needs. Needs that should be met with universally designed learning. She has sat through many board meetings but has never felt the need to cry until tonight.

J. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Motion to adjourn.

Move: Jason Chance Second: Laura Harthan Status: Passed

*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.