

Monadnock Regional School District (MRSD)
School Board Meeting Minutes
August 17, 2021
In person at the MRMHS Library/Zoom, Swanzey, NH

Members Present: Kristen Noonan, Winston Wright, Colleen Toomey, Scott Peters, Cheryl McDaniel-Thomas, Michelle Connor, Karen Wheeler via Zoom, Eric Stanley, Lisa Steadman, Nick Mosher via Zoom, Brian Bohannon, Dan LeClair and Betty Tatro.

Administration Present: L. Witte, Superintendent, J. Rathbun, Director of Curriculum Student Assessment and J. Morin, Business Administrator.

Also Present: L. Aivaliotis, Recording Secretary via Zoom

“We collaborate not just to teach, but also to engage and educate every student in our district in an environment that is challenging, caring and safe, while fostering life-long learning.”

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** S. Peters called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:** M. Diven would like the Board to consider mandatory masks. The delta is worse than the first round. She is concerned the elementary students are not vaccinated. There are more kids in the hospital than the first strain. She hopes that the Board would consider mandatory masks.

Adam Hopkins of Troy sent an email to the Troy Board reps for clarification on a non-public session. It took L. Steadman 2 weeks to respond. The response from the Board Member was cc to the administration. This is a Board issue not the administration. He commented that when the Board votes to go into a non-public session they need to explain which RSA they are going under and nothing else can be discussed. He said the process should have been discussed. Also the 9:18 PM Non-Public Minutes were sealed. There are specific reasons to seal the minutes and he asked for the reason. Process matters, transparency, response and accountability.

Henry Sokol is a parent from Troy and a health care worker would like to ask the Board to consider mandating the masks. The vaccines are not for children. We are currently in worse shape than last time. We are still dealing with COVID after 15 months. We have a right to educate the students at school. The masks will allow the students to be educated in school. He would ask the Board to consider mandating the masks.

K. Craig from Fitzwilliam and a previous teacher and Assistant Superintendent in the MRSD is

currently the COVID grant manager in Hinsdale. She said there is a process the District must use in order to spend the COVID funds. She had concerns on the spending of the ESSER funds that were voted on in a Non-Public Session on June 15, 2021. She said the District must post on the website the use of the ESSER funds. The District needs to let the public know and they must be able to give input. The input is a requirement. She said she would not have used those funds that way. You can but it is not the best way. The ESSER funds are to be used on students. She does support the staff and the students but there are better ways to say thank you. The staff will appreciate time more. Time to do the work. Hire an agency to cover the staff for professional development on ways to reach these kids. Ask the public they will come up with many ideas. Hire more teachers. The stipends voted on will not have a long term effect. It was legal but not held in a legal way. Engage all stakeholders. The \$450,000.00 should go directly to the kids, be careful in non-public and stipends should be in public session.

J. Craig is also concerned. There is no more important job than a teacher. They deserve support. If they need to be paid more, pay them more. The students have been impacted by COVID be more creative for the teachers. He would encourage the Board to use the funds to directly address the deficit issues that are measurable.

D. Coffman is frustrated with the lack of agenda content. We need to recover the education of the students that was lost. He does not see it on the agenda or in the minutes. The Board needs to help get this together. He would urge them to use common sense and education needs to take the helm. The delivery of education needs to be paramount. We need to be more aggressive. He also commented that kids are not learning as effectively because they are wearing masks. The staff and the administration have been immunized. He wanted the Board to know he was not happy about the \$450,000.00 or how it was done in non-public. The staff did a great job and they received raises. The funds could have been used on the kids such as recovering the lack of the delivery of education. Take the agenda and make it matter to the kids.

Kristan Tilton is in favor of the masks. One child could spread it to the entire classroom. The CDC and the Dept. of Pediatrics suggest masks. The kids went to school because the masks were being worn. One maskless individual can spread to all. We want our kids to be in class and learn safely.

3. CELEBRATE MRSD: L. Witte explained the ESSER funds were used to build the pavilions. The new teacher orientation will be held at the Wilcox pavilion. The Tech/Ed addition is moving quickly and is being put back together for the first day of school.

4. MATTERS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION:

a. Operations/Superintendent's Report:

i. ARP ESSER III Preliminary Spending Plan: The administration will be

seeking input for the ARP ESSER III. A press release went out. Out of the 3.9 million dollars from the grant we have allocated 2.6 million. Once we submit the plan they will release the funds. Twenty-five percent of the funds are for education, academics and learning gaps. Funds will be used or have been used to update air quality in the buildings. The CARES I and CARES II funds will be used or have been used for online learning and interventionists. The administration is asking for input regarding the ESSER III funds. L. Steadman asked about nursing support with the funds. L. Witte explained the CARES were used for nursing support. We have 2 nurse substitutes for this year. J. Rathbun explained the process the District needs to do to disclose to the State how to use the funds, it will go to the State as well as other State agencies then we can write it in the grant. B. Bohannon asked if there was any feedback on the wish list from the staff. J. Rathbun said no. We have not heard a lot from the staff. Some of the ESSER funds were used at individual schools on how to address the academic impact.

ii. Fall Reopening Update: L. Witte explained the shared correspondence she had from Dr. Chan. It was suggested to look at the county levels of transmission. Ninety-two percent of the staff have been vaccinated, that cannot be said for the students. There are less than 30% of the students between 12-19 years of age who are vaccinated. L. Witte reviewed the guidance recommended by DHHS. **MOTION:** B. Bohannon **MOTION:** to adjust the reopening plan matrix for universal indoor mask wearing while the county is in the moderate transmission level or above. **SECOND:** N. Mosher. **DISCUSSION:** N. Mosher commented this is to be proactive and not wait for the worst case scenario. K. Wheeler supports this also. She would suggest all elementary students wear masks until a period of time in which they are all vaccinated. L. Witte said we do not have that ability to say you can or cannot due to the vaccine. K. Wheeler would like to say until the vaccine is available and the students are vaccinated. She is not sure of a specific time in which to be fully vaccinated. D. LeClair does not agree. He is against the masks and feels they are harmful to the students. He also read studies and the results of the studies. He would say this is child abuse to ask the students to wear the masks. N. Mosher said to use the recommendation on masks from World Health, the State of NH, Department of Pediatrics and the DHHS. He will vote in the direction of the experts and ask the rest of the Board to do the same. B. Bohannon said some families will choose not to have their child vaccinated. We want to have the kids in school, safe and focusing. Masks are the best bet of learning and staying in school. It is in our best interest to take this step. B. Bohannon also commented that we are not offering remote learning. It was commented that some students have immune problems. K. Wheeler and N. Mosher agreed with this motion. **VOTE:** 8.761/4.239/0/0. **Motion passes.** **MOTION:** to require all MRSD elementary school students to wear masks until 3 weeks following the first opportunity for elementary age children to be fully vaccinated. **SECOND:** M. Connor. **DISCUSSION:** E. Stanley said it was out of order. S. Peters said we can not assume the vaccine is the same as a child and an adult. K. Noonan will vote against this. L. Steadman will vote against this. M. Connor commented that at Beyond the Bell the students were outside and did not have masks. K. Wheeler said we have students that have health issues and we

do not offer remote learning. E. Stanley commented students did not wear masks during the summer program, there was a lot of rain which put kids inside and how many cases of COVID were there. **VOTE:** 2.045/10.555/0/0. **Motion fails.**

L. Witte explained the COVID leave policy of last year. She has since worked with legal counsel and developed a new policy for this year. The policy did not make the Board packet. L. Witte presented it to the Board tonight. There are fewer potential days available, clear parameters for eligibility and no eligibility. Staff cannot work from home. She hopes the Board will endorse this. S. Peters reminded L. Witte of the 1st read and 2nd read vote. L. Witte explained this is not a policy. It is a temporary rule. She is not certain that the 1st read and 2nd read apply. We did not do them with the MOUs. **MOTION:** N. Mosher **MOVED** to adopt the COVID-19 Leave Policy as presented. **SECOND:** C. McDaniel-Thomas. **DISCUSSION:** B. Bohannon said he will support. It was well written. L. Witte explained this is for all staff. **VOTE:** 8.761/0/4.239/0. **Motion passes.**

iii. **Staffing Update:** L. Witte updated the Board on what has happened since last year. There are 23 new employees in the district. There are 14.5 vacancies that remain. There are 2 contracted providers. She explained the District has done ads and in the 5 districts in the region there are about 64 vacancies. It is not just this District. There is an extreme shortage of people. We still have 2 weeks. B. Bohannon asked if the administration felt the current mentoring is okay for 23 new staff. J. Rathbun said the administration is going to rethink it. We have not done a lot of mentoring for staff other than teachers. He has met with a group and had drafted something over the summer. We have the same people doing the mentoring and some things get missed. We are meeting tomorrow regarding position vacancies. L. Witte said the rate of pay for paras could be part of the vacancies. We had a lot of applicants but lacked credentials. Lack of education. We do have alternatives but they are time intensive for the district. We always look for certified staff. K. Noonan said the rate of pay cannot change until the vote of the taxpayers. N. Mosher asked if there is anything as far as resources the Board can do to help. L. Witte said the pay scale on the MESSA Contract really needs to be looked at. S. Peters asked if there are agencies that contract. L. Witte said she is not a fan of contracting for paraprofessionals and teachers. L. Steadman suggested a recruiter to help fill the positions. It was suggested to look at the rate for subs. L. Witte said it would be good to look at it again. The certified staff receive \$85.00 a day and uncertified staff receive \$75.00 a day as substitutes. We are in line with local competitors. **MOTION:** B. Bohannon **MOVED** to increase the certified staff substitute pay to \$125.00 per day. **SECOND:** **The motion fails for a lack of a second.** L. Witte would like to come back to the Board with more information. B. Bohannon said if we need to be aggressive he is okay with that. E. Stanley suggested offering bonuses upfront. It may be worth it. S. Peters said any additional funds would open negotiations. He suggested seeking legal counsel. L. Witte said she may not be able to get guidance on that before the next meeting. L. Steadman suggested a total compensation document to present to the candidate. S. Peters said we do not have a strategy

for those not interested in benefits.

iv. Divisive Topics Legislation: L. Witte attended a workshop around HB 2 Sections 297 and 298, Right to Freedom from Discrimination in Public Workplaces and Education. We have policies that address academic guidance but they are very vague. The Board had received this information in their Board packet. S. Peters said the NHSBA is waiting for the Bulletin on this policy. J. Rathbun said no one wants to be responsible. How do we explain it to parents? N. Mosher said he understands it is frustrating but we do have a responsibility to the staff. S. Peters asked if there would be a risk to have the staff receive the policies. J. Rathbun said Google Classroom posts lessons, clear communication to the parents. B. Bohannon said it would not be wise to give the 7 policies in a nutshell to parents. An understandable document with clear answers for parents. L. Witte said lessons are available on Google Classroom.

b. Legislative Committee: Advocating for RSA 91:A to allow virtual committee meetings: L. Steadman explained Senate Bill 95 is to study virtual committee meetings and it is still out there. Is the Board interested in bringing this topic to a Delegate Assembly? There may be an opportunity on October 16 if the Board is interested. She said she would come up with a sample and bring it to the October Meeting. The Board has missed the deadline for the Delegate Assembly but we could also do it for next year.

c. Community Relations Committee Report: C. McDaniel-Thomas reported the committee met this evening and reviewed the timeline. The Listening Sessions will be scheduled for late Sept. and Oct. The committee will be sending out letters to the Selectboards regarding time and place. We hope to give K. Barker the dates and times for the sessions soon in order for him to be in attendance. The PR Firm will create a slideshow and the committee chose the sample presentation based on the Pentucket School District format website. The Finance/Facilities Committee and the Education Committee will be able to take information and drop it into the slide. She asked members of the Board to give her the drop dead dates to place an article in their town's newsletters.

d. Board Chair Report/Budget Committee Update:

i. Budget Committee Update: The Budget Committee did not make a quorum but they did have discussions on how the grants funds were spent, the process used, receiving legal advice and a follow up. The Budget Committee felt there was missing content on some of the minutes. They felt the response to emails was not timely. S. Peters said we did not act inappropriately; over the summer we meet only once a month.

E. Stanley leaves the meeting.

ii. Upcoming Elementary School Walk-Through Meetings: S. Peters explained during the walk-throughs K. Barker and Assoc. will have the opportunity to explain each building and the potential renovations to be made through the bond vote. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. After the walk-throughs the Facilities Committee will have to

work with K. Barker regarding the numbers.

iii. **Update on 2021/22 Capital Improvement Planning:** It was suggested to ask E. Stanley to change the date of the ECC Meeting in order for the Fin/Fac. Committee to schedule a meeting on Sept. 14. The committee will get into the line by line of the CIP and the K. Barker and Assoc. Report. It is suggested that the Board reps. attend the Listening Session in their town.

5. MATTERS THAT REQUIRE BOARD ACTION:

a. **Motion to suspend policy DJE and approve Barker Assoc. To extend assessment work to MRMHS:** S.Peters is suggesting a full assessment at the MRMHS. This will be a room by room inspection at the cost of \$13,400.00. It was asked about an increase in the CIP and S. Peters said there is an inflation rate in the CIP. **N. Mosher leaves the meeting. MOTION:** S.Peters **MOVED** to suspend policy DJE and approve Barker Assoc. To extend assessment work to MRMHS at a cost of \$13,400.00. **SECOND:** L. Steadman. **DISCUSSION:** J. Morin explained there is a savings in service contracts. There is an opportunity to have the extra funds. K. Noonan said she does agree and it is important for the voters to know what is going on. **VOTE:** 11.665/0/0/1.335. **Motion passes.**

b. **Approve Student Tuition Rate (\$18,225.00): MOTION:** L. Steadman **MOVED** to approve the MRSD regular tuition rate at \$18,225.00. **SECOND:** W. Wright. **DISCUSSION:** J. Morin explained this is based on the State average cost per pupil. **VOTE:** 10.909/.757/0/1.335. **Motion passes.** The Special Ed. tuition rate will be discussed at the next meeting.

c. **Manifest: MOTION:** B. Tatro **MOVED** the manifest for FY21 in the amount of \$175,731.36 and the manifest for FY22 in the amount of \$1,577,039.19 . **SECOND:** W. Wright **VOTE:** 10.909/0/0/2.091. **Motion passes.**

d. **Annual Audit: Required Board Survey:** S.Peters explained the required Board survey is part of the audit and he would ask the members to respond to it. He will be sending it out.

e. **Policies for Second Read:**
i. **IGAL/ECF-Energy Conversation (retire IGAL/adopt ECF)**
ii. **IGDB/JICE-Student Publications (retire IGDB, update JICE)**
iii. **KDC-Website Publishing (update)**
iv. **IGDD-Student Performance (retire):**
v. **IGDG-Student Activities Fund Management (retire):**
vi. **IGDH-Non-school sponsored contests for students (retire): MOTION:** K. Noonan **MOVED** to accept the suite of 2nd read policies as presented. **SECOND:** C. Toomey. **VOTE:** 11.665/0/0/1.335. **Motion passes.**

f. **July 20, 2021 Minutes: MOTION:** W.Wright **MOVED** to approve the July 20, 2021 Public Meeting Minutes as amended. **SECOND:** M. Connor **VOTE:** 7.544/0/4.121/1.335. **Motion passes.**

g. **Sealed Minutes:** The Board will discuss the Sealed Minutes at the next meeting.

6. SETTING NEXT MEETING'S AGENDA:

- a. **Staffing Updates and per diem rates for substitutes**
- b. **1st Meeting in October Committee virtual meeting**
- c. **Review legal counsel regarding non-public compensation discussion**
- d. **Follow-Up on Audit**
- e. **Sealed Minutes**
- f. **Reopening Progress, etc.**
- g. **Special Ed. Tuition Rate**
- h. **Summer Program Recap**
- i. **Cookies**
- j. **Budget Transfer for MRSD Inspection services**

7. **Public Comments:** D. Coffman commented on the fact the district is having a hard time getting candidates for positions. He would suggest the administration continue to be creative when hiring. He also said that the masks are a dead mistake. Over 90% of the staff are vaccinated. The amount of deaths from COVID in the State between the ages of 0-29 is one. He does not understand, please reconsider the masks.

8. **ADJOURNMENT: MOTION:** C. Toomey **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting at 9:53 PM. **SECOND:** C.McDaniel-Thomas **VOTE:** 11.665/0/0/1.335. **Motion passes.**

Respectfully submitted,

Laura L. Aivaliotis
Recording Secretary

VOTING KEY:Yes/No/Abstain/Absent