

Seneca Valley School District



SCHOOL BOARD ACTION SESSION

Seneca Valley Intermediate High School Auditorium - 7 p.m.

Minutes

May 8, 2023

1. **CALL TO ORDER** by Ms. Kathy Whittle, President, called the meeting to order at 7:26 p.m.
 - A. **Moment of Silence** – The meeting was opening with a moment of silence in memory of Mr. Ronald Zinkham, who passed away on April 27. The late Mr. Zinkham initially taught math and science to Seneca Valley high school students and later went on to serve as Principal of the former Seneca Valley Junior High School. Please keep in your thoughts his wife, daughter, and extended family and friends.
 - B. **Pledge of Allegiance** - Koah Alwine, a first grader at Ehrman Crest Elementary School, continued the board initiative, “I Led the Pledge” by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - C. **Roll Call** - by Ms. Julia Benson, School Board Secretary, showed the following members in attendance: Ms. Leslie Bredl, Mr. Eric DiTullio, Ms. Susan Harrison, Mr. Tim Hester, Mr. Mike Jacobs, Mr. Jim Nickel, Mr. Fred Peterson, Ms. Kathy Whittle, and Mr. Jeff Widdowson.

2. **INFORMATION REPORTS**
 - A. **Student/Staff Recognition**
 1. The Seneca Valley High School Math League team recently placed first in the region and 11th out of 95 participating high schools across the state. Math League gives students an educationally enriching opportunity to participate in academically oriented activities and to gain recognition for mathematical achievement. The competition covers topics appropriate to grade level and involves mathematical areas of interest to high-achieving students.
 2. Three Seneca Valley seniors qualified and attended the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) All-Eastern Conference.
 3. Over 20 Seneca Valley students, grades 7-9, were recently selected for the Pennsylvania Music Educator’s Association (PMEA) District 5 Junior High Band Fest at Hopewell High School.

4. Seventeen Seneca Valley musicians earned top honors at the annual Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) All-State Festival and Conference. In the Performing Arts world this is the equivalent of making it to the state championship. The PMEA All-State Festival and Conference took place in Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania, and featured students from the jazz ensemble, wind ensemble, choir and orchestra.
5. Three Seneca Valley students in senior high school media production classes were named winners at Robert Morris University's annual Digital Media Arts Consortium (DMAC) student video festival on April 20. The DMAC festival was held on the arena floor of the UPMC Events Center and featured student representatives from dozens of western Pennsylvania schools.
6. Seneca Valley had 32 students from grades 4-12 compete against approximately 800 other students from schools all over the country in the Academic Games League of America (AGLOA) National Tournament, which took place in Orlando, Florida, April 21-24. Students first qualified in both regional and state competitions before heading to nationals where Seneca Valley brought home 15 individual and team awards, including two national champions in the elementary division: Emily Browne, Haine Middle School fifth grader, who was awarded National Champion in the Game of Linguishtik, and Breanna Zimmerman, Haine Middle School sixth grader, who was awarded National Champion in the Game of Equations.
7. Jeremiah Friday, Haine Elementary School gifted support teacher and Academic Games elementary advisor, was named an Outstanding Educator at the AGLOA National Tournament.

- B. **Dates to Remember** - Ms. Linda Andreassi announced the following dates to remember:

May	Mental Health Awareness Month
May 8-11	Advanced Placement Testing
May 10	National School Nurse Day
May 12	Act 80 (Professional Development) Day – No School for Students
May 12	Graduation Project Day – SVSHS
May 13	Prom – Grand March begins at 5 p.m. – SVSHS
May 14	Mother's Day
May 15-26	Keystone Exams
May 20	Armed Forces Day
May 29	Memorial Day Holiday – No school for students and staff
June 1	Graduation Day (June 2 is the Rain Date)
June 7	Last Day of School for K-11
June 8	Staff In-Service Day

- C. **All-Star Award Winner, May 2023** – Ms. Tammy Tappe, Ehrman Crest Elementary/Middle School Cafeteria Manager, was recognized and presented the All-Star Award by Director of Food Service, Mr. Nolen Fetchko. Mr. Fetchko shared that Ms. Tappe is in a new position, in a new building and working for a new director all in one year. Mr. Fetchko continued to share that Ms. Tappe has handled all of this

change in stride, that she is organized and that she always has a smile on her face. Mr. Fetchko recognizes that Ms. Tappe's main goal each day is that everyone leaves the cafeteria having a better day than when they came in and thanked her for going above and beyond. Mr. DiTullio thanked her for all that she has done for the students and staff at Ehrman Crest. Dr. Vitale commented that she has been in the building on numerous occasions where she and others have seen firsthand the little things that Ms. Tappe and her staff have done that contribute to a positive community and culture. Dr. Vitale thanked her and the cafeteria staff for all that they do, sharing that they are recognized and valued. Ms. Whittle commented that smiling is contagious and thanked Ms. Tappe for all her efforts.

D. **Agency Reports**

1. Vo-Tech - Mr. Jacobs reported that they recently held multiple meetings. He is excited to report that they were able to hear from students that were recognized as SkillsUSA competitors, and that he is hopeful that one of our Seneca Valley students will be able to attend the next School Board meeting to share her sculpture and senior project. Mr. Jacobs also shared that the Vo-Tech is also now a part of the social media case that Seneca Valley has joined in filing.
2. I.U. IV - Mr. Eric DiTullio reported that the I.U. IV had their meeting and annual convention on April 26, thanking Ms. Whittle for attending the annual convention. Mr. DiTullio was elected to serve an additional three-year term through June 30, 2026. Additional individuals that were elected for the same three-year term were Bill Halle of Butler, Rodney Bobby of Mercer and Deborah Roberson of Sharon City. Michael Lenzi of Sharpsville was elected to fill a remaining one-year term that he will fill until June 30, 2024. At this time, there are two openings on the board. Justin Kirkwood of Laurel submitted his resignation, and it was accepted prior to the board meeting and convention, and Bill Halle has also submitted his resignation. Due to Mr. Halle's resignation, Mr. DiTullio is now the lead and only board member negotiating with the teachers to finalize the contract.

- E. **Legislative** - Mr. Eric DiTullio reported that the House of Representatives passed two bills recently to address teacher shortages: House Bill 141, Grow-Your-Own-Educators, and House Bill 688, PA Teacher Pipeline Scholarships. In addition, the House Education Committee approved House Bill 100, Cross-Age Tutoring Program.

The House Republican Policy Committee held a hearing to discuss school bus transportation. Among the topics discussed is the shortage of school bus drivers which may be due to the requirements to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) needed to operate a bus. It was noted that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration extended until November 2024, the opportunity for states to have the option of waiving the portion of the commercial driver's license (CDL) skills test that requires school bus driver applicants to identify the "under the hood" engine components. Testifiers from the school bus industry spoke in support for enactment of a Pennsylvania-specific school bus driver CDL license that would include the provisions of the waiver.

The Senate Education Committee approved Senate Bill 97, Community Engaged Schools for Success; Senate Bill 290, Observance of September 11 in schools; Senate Bills 353 and Senate Bill 456, Displays of the PA Constitution; and US Constitution and Senate Bill 647, Financial Literacy Course Requirements.

In addition, Mr. DiTullio reported on the Pennsylvania School Employee's Retirement Systems (PSERS) sharing the Secretary of Banking and Securities is an ex-officio. In addition, he shared that the acting Secretary of Banking and Securities, Sarah Hammer, has stepped down as acting secretary. Also, Governor Shapiro has named Wendy Spicher, as Interim Acting Secretary of Banking and Securities.

F. **Financial Reports**

1. Operations
2. Senior High Activities
3. Intermediate High Activities
4. Middle School Activities
5. Athletics
6. Food Service
7. Tax Collections
8. Capital Projects Funds

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT** – There was no public comment.

4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- A. **Work Session** – April 17, 2023
- B. **Action Meeting** – April 24, 2023

5. **TREASURER'S REPORT**

6. **GENERAL FUND BILLS**

Grand Total: \$3,055,191.06

7. **CONSTRUCTION FUND BILLS**

Grand Total: \$452,171.01

Mr. Hester made a motion, seconded by Ms. Harrison, to approve the minutes, treasurer's report, general fund bills and construction fund bills. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative.

8. **ADMINISTRATION ACTION**

- A. **Board Policy** – Approved Board Policy 915, Booster Clubs, second reading, final reading.
- B. **Care Solace Agreement** - Approved utilization of PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) grant funds for the board-approved Care Solace agreement to provide mental health care coordination and support for students, staff and their families during the 2023-24 school year.

- C. **Board Meeting Dates** – Approved the July through December 2023 School Board Meeting Dates.
- D. **Student Adjudications** – Approved the following student adjudications:
 1. #2022-23-35
 2. #2022-23-36
 3. #2022-23-37

Mr. DiTullio raised the question around the August School Board meeting dates and why the meetings would be on Tuesday, August 1, and August 14. Dr. Vitale answered that this is to allow time for interviews and hiring for the upcoming school year.

Mr. Widdowson made a motion, seconded by Mr. DiTullio, to approve the board policy, care solace agreement, board meeting dates and the student adjudications. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative.

9. INSTRUCTION ACTION

- A. **Conferences** – Approved conference requests.
- B. **Grant Disbursements** – Granted permission to apply and disburse, the following grants:
 1. PPG Innovative Classroom Grant in the amount of \$1,000 requested by Mr. Tim Cammisa. Funds will be used to purchase fly tying kits and fly-fishing supplies to support the Fly-Fishing Club at Haine Middle School.
 2. Disability Inclusive Curriculum Pilot Program through the PA Department of Education in the amount of \$30,000 for professional development; resources and materials; analysis; planning; and implementation of programming for students with disabilities that ensure more inclusivity; better understanding of needs; increased access to opportunity; and enhanced curriculum.
 3. The Highmark Foundation School Grant in the amount of \$7,500 for continuation of the “Leader In Me” school program that equips Connoquenessing Valley Elementary students with essential leadership and life-readiness skills. If approved, the Seneca Valley Foundation will contribute to the cost of the program as well.
- C. **Student Trip** – Approved the Senior High School Biology Club to go to Mifflinburg, PA. on May 23, 2023, returning on May 24, 2023, at no cost to the district and under the supervision of Dana Hadley. The students will miss two days of instruction.
- D. **Glade Run Day Student Education Agreement** - Approved the agreement with Glade Run Lutheran Services for the provision of educational services for Seneca Valley students at their St. Stephens Academy, Special Education Transitions Program, and Partial Hospitalization programs during the 2023-24 school year.

Mr. DiTullio recognized that our district is committed to creating a culture of diversity and inclusion. He shared that the Disability Inclusive Curriculum Pilot Program grant helps to financially fulfill this need. Mr. DiTullio thanked Dr. Jeff Roberts and Ms. Annie Mersing for all they do to obtain grants like this one.

Ms. Harrison made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hester, to approve conferences, grant disbursements, student trip and the Glade Run Day Student Education Agreement. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative.

10. BUSINESS/FINANCE ACTION

- A. **Sale of Properties** – Consented to the sale of three properties located within Seneca Valley School District (MP#s 130-4F121-13-0000, 160-S2-F28-0000, 400-S1-B142-0000) by the Butler County Tax Claim Bureau.
- B. **Bid Awards** – Awarded the following bids for the 2023-24 school year:
 - 1. General Supplies
 - 2. Maintenance Supplies
 - 3. Print Supplies
 - 4. Copier Paper Supplies
- C. **Depository/Treasurer** – Appointed NextTier Bank as depository and treasurer for the 2023-24 school year.
- D. **Budget Transfers** – Approved the budget transfers.
- E. **YMCA Corporate 25 Community Partnership** - Approved the renewal Corporate 25 Community Partnership agreement between the Butler County YMCA and Seneca Valley School District to provide membership discounts and benefits for district employees.

Dr. Vitale shared that the district pays \$2,500 to the YMCA Corporate 25 Community Partnership agreement because it is a great way to support the staff. In the 2022-23 school year, 57 employees participated in the membership discount, and she is hoping that more will be able to utilize it in the next year.

Mr. Jacobs made a motion, seconded by Ms. Bredl, to approve the sale of properties, bid awards, depository/treasurer, budget transfers and the YMCA Corporate 25 Community Partnership. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative.

- F. **Proposed 2023-24 Budget** – Approve the proposed 2023-24 budget in the amount of \$168,089,185 with a ___ millage and ___ increase and authorize the budget to be made available for public inspection.

Mr. Jacobs thanked Ms. Burtner and recognized that the board was given two different proposed budgets to review. He shared that one budget reflects a no millage increase and the second budget reflects a 2.55 mill or 1.95% increase and that both options draw down on the fund balance. Mr. Jacobs recognizes that there are several large projects on the horizon, that there are extraordinary costs such as the price for additional security, increase in space, increase in utilities, and rate

increases, the Seneca Valley Academy of Choice Drop-In Center, debt payments, cost for salaries and benefits, but believes that we do not need to increase the rate.

Ms. Burtner acknowledged that the board was presented for consideration the 2023-24 proposed budget in the amount of \$160,089,185 in operating expenses plus \$8 million in a transfer to capital projects for a total budget of \$168,089,185. The board was given information on two different scenarios for funding the expenditure budget. One of the proposed budgets has a no millage increase yielding a total of \$156,415,666 with a deficit budget of \$3,673,519. The other proposed budget includes a millage increase of 1.95%, or 2.55 mills, bringing the total revenue to \$158,173,695 with a reduction of the operating deficit to \$1,915,490.

Aside from the two different real estate rates, everything else in the revenue proposals are the same. Ms. Burtner shared some highlights:

- The value of a mill is expected to grow just over 2% due to real estate development. This increase is trending less robust than in the past few years where other taxes are holding steady or increasing slightly.
- Interest rates have gone up significantly since last year at this time, adding approximately \$2 million to the revenue.
- Ms. Burtner has budgeted some new state subsidy, but currently, there has not been much word on the state budget.
- PlanCon funding has gone down significantly as eligible bond issues are expiring and the program is now defunct.
- Federal funding has been reduced in next year's budget as COVID grants are winding down.

The millage rate approved will determine the total projected revenue available to fund the expenditures, but with both alternatives having a draw on the fund balance to balance the budget. Ms. Burtner explained that the significance of establishing the millage is not only the amount that reflects the board's comfort level with drawing from the fund balance, but also the long-term financial position and debt management as we prepare for additional large capital projects.

Some highlights that are included in the expenditures budget are extraordinary cost increases for the 2023-24 budget, an increase of \$250,000 for additional safety and security staffing, an increase in utilities due to rate increases and additional spaces at Ehrman Crest and the Seneca Valley Academy of Choice (SVAOC) Drop-In Center, space lease for the SVAOC Drop-In Center, the debt payment will increase due to the Ehrman Crest project, along with costs for salaries and benefits that make up more than 70% of the budget.

Outside of the operating budget, this budget also reflects a transfer to the capital reserve fund of \$8 million to help cover current capital projects and to help prepare for the upcoming major projects.

Dr. Vitale shared that 72% of the budget is staff costs and that with the additional staff positions for the 2023-24 school year, 1.4 million will need to be added to the budget to cover the anticipated salaries.

Mr. Jacobs thanked Ms. Burtner again for her work and shared that he fully supports the expenditure side of the budget. He does support a zero increase for this year, sharing that the budget

is in a healthy position and that the board may need to raise taxes soon, but he does not believe they need to be raised at this time.

Mr. DiTullio shared that he can not agree with Mr. Jacobs and shared that the team does things as economically as possible. Mr. DiTullio wants to be cautiously optimistic but does not want to be fooled by the state like in 2008-09. He reminded everyone that in the next decade, buildings will be updated. His recommendation is to go to zero next year and that, at this time, he is in support of 1.95% increase.

Mr. Hester shared that he is leaning towards the 1.95% increase as well. He is concerned with the inflation rates and that expenses will continue to rise. By increasing the taxes 1.95%, this will allow additional funding for security in our district. With this increase, it will come down to about \$6 a month for the average family in the district.

Mr. Nickel commented that we have the best debt rating in the county and to have debt is not a bad problem to have; having too much debt is the problem. He acknowledged the future projects and that we do need to take all of those into consideration for a possible tax increase while looking two-six years in the future. He believes that there should be a 0% increase this year and that we should continue to operate as we have been doing.

Ms. Bredl thanked Ms. Burtner and the Finance Committee for their recommendations and insight. She recognized all the increases that she is seeing personally, and she is in favor of the 1.95% increase as she feels it is the safer option.

Mr. Widdowson thanked Ms. Burtner and the Finance Committee for all they have done. He is concerned that we don't know what the future will hold, and he feels more comfortable with the 1.95% increase this year to provide a safety net and to be able to increase safety and security in the district.

Ms. Harrison shared that she agrees with the 1.95% increase as well. She recognized the amounts of supplies we use and that costs have increased.

Mr. Peterson commented that this is one of the most complex conversations that has been had amongst the board in a while. One of the main goals of the board has been to preserve and enhance the educational experience for all students. He agrees with being conservative and implementing a small increase this year.

Ms. Whittle shared that she is in favor of a slight increase that will help with the increasing supply and labor costs.

Mr. DiTullio made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hester to approve the proposed 2023-24 budget in the amount of \$168,089,185 with a 2.55 millage and 1.95% increase and authorize the budget to be made available for public inspection. The motion carried on a roll call vote with seven members voting "yes" and Mr. James Nickel and Mr. Mike Jacobs voting "no."

11. **PERSONNEL** – Approved the following personnel items that were discussed in executive session held prior to the meeting:

A. **Appointments** – *Director* – Edward Kurtz III, *Professional Substitutes* – Dale Zacherl, *Classified* – Lisa Fico, Julie Shearer, Stephanie Keebler, *Supplementals* – Amanda

Bondi, Alyssa Ceraulo, Grace Rupik, David Gerrich, Emily Thorton, Kurt McKnaught, Adelina DiTullio, Ciara Was, Jeremiah Friday.

- B. **Addendum to Contract** – Lynn Burtner
- C. **Leaves** – *Professional* – Torrie LaMantia, Emily Delaney, Rebekah Grinnen, Chessa Crum, Julie Kaufman, Kate Oliver, Andra Titus, *Classified* – Jerry Chuhra, Lisa Reece, Loretta McCafferty
- D. **Agreement** – with SVESP/PSEA and an employee
- E. **Retirement Extension** – Director – Lynn Burtner

Mr. Widdowson made a motion, seconded by Mr. DiTullio to approve appointments, addendum to contract, leaves, agreement, and retirement extension. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Mr. DiTullio abstaining.

12. **LETTERS SENT TO THE SCHOOL BOARD** - The following constituents communicated through the SVSD school board email account after posting the April 24, 2023, public agenda:
- a. Mark Wilkerson
 - b. The Horvath's
 - c. Michele Margittai
 - d. Eric Goucher
 - e. Cindy Speck
 - f. Tiffany Monz
 - g. Donna Volpe

Mr. Nickel shared that he continues to sub as a bus driver and recently has been driving a Connoquenessing Valley Elementary (CVE) route. He was surprised and very appreciative of all that CVE and that SV did to make him feel appreciated during Bus Driver Appreciation Week.

Mr. Peterson acknowledged the school nurses and that they are a wonderful group of individuals. He thanked them for all that they do.

13. **ADJOURNMENT** - - With nothing further to come before the board, Mr. Nickel motioned, seconded by Mr. DiTullio to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 p.m. The motion carried on a voice vote with those present voting in the affirmative.
14. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** – An executive session was held prior to this meeting to discuss personnel items.

Ms. Kathy Whittle, President

Ms. Julia Benson, School Board Secretary