

Seneca Valley School District



SCHOOL BOARD WORK SESSION

In Person - Seneca Valley Intermediate High School Auditorium - 7:00 p.m.

MINUTES

October 5, 2020

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** by Mr. James Nickel, President, called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m.
 - A. **Moment of Silence** – The meeting was opened with a moment of silence.
 - B. **Pledge of Allegiance** – London Maccaglia, a first grader at Rowan Elementary School, continued the board meeting initiative, “I Led the Pledge,” by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - C. **Roll Call** – Roll call by Ms. Lisa Mislán, Board Secretary, showed the following members in attendance: Ms. Leslie Bredl, Mr. Eric DiTullio, Ms. Susan Harrison, Mr. Timothy Hester, Mr. Mike Jacobs, Mr. James Nickel, Mr. Frederick Peterson Jr., Ms. Kathy Whittle, and Mr. Jeffrey Widdowson.

Others present included Dr. Tracy Vitale, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. Matthew McKinley, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary; Dr. Sean McCarty, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary; Ms. Kyra Bobak, Human Resources Director; Ms. Lynn Burtner, Business Manager; Ms. Linda Andreassi, Director of Communications; Mr. Gerald Miller, Special Education and Gifted Director; Mr. Randy Miller, Director of Buildings and Grounds; Ms. Heather Lewis, Athletic Director; Dr. Marie Palano, Supervisor of Analytics and Federal Programs; Dr. Jeffrey Roberts, Supervisor of Gifted Education and Student Services; Mr. James Pearson, Director of Transportation; Ms. Annie Mersing, Director of Advancement; Mr. Jeffrey James, Director of Safety and Security; Mr. Matthew Hoffman, Solicitor; Ms. Nannette Farmer, Rowan Elementary Principal; Ms. Hannah Hamilton, Rowan Elementary Teacher, Ms. Yvonne Debrzanski, SVEA, and a press representative.

2. INFORMATION REPORTS

- A. **Student/Staff Recognition** – Ms. Linda Andreassi announced the following:
 1. Seneca Valley junior vocalist Alex Mortier (Tenor II) and senior instrumentalist Lizzie Sylves (Bassoon) qualified to participate in the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) All-National Honor Ensembles. To be eligible for the National level, students were required to have participated in the state level festival in their home state during the previous school year. In addition, they had to submit an audition video for consideration. Although the actual in-person festival was recently canceled due to the pandemic, it does not change the extremely prestigious accomplishment of Alex and Lizzie. We applaud and congratulate both for being recognized on a national level for their musical talents, dedication and hard work.

2. Being kind worked wonders for Ms. Katie Rengers' fourth-grade classroom at Haine Elementary. The class was recently named a winner in the Penguin Random House Wonder Kindness Challenge. Students shared with Ms. Rengers acts of kindness they saw each other doing, and each time a cotton ball was added to a "kindness jar." Prizes included school planners and swag; a class set of the book "We're All Wonders" by R. J. Palacio; and a generous donation of \$500 to a charity of their choosing. Ms. Rengers graciously chose the Seneca Valley Foundation as the recipient of the donation.

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

October	National Principals Month and Breast Cancer Awareness Month
October 5	World Teachers' Day
October 5	Green Phase Learning Model Begins
October 12	School Board Meeting, 7:00 p.m.
October 17	SHS PSAT Testing
October 23	SVAOC Cyber End of First Nine Weeks, Grades 7-12
October 28	End of First Nine Weeks, Grades 7-12
October 31	Halloween
November 1	Daylight Savings Time Ends

C. **Agency Reports**

1. Vo-Tech – Mr. Nickel reported attending the Oct. 1 meeting with Mr. Jacobs noting that the Vo-tech is working through the beginning of the school year and everything is going relatively well.
2. I.U. IV – Mr. Eric DiTullio stated that the I.U. IV is preparing the 2019-20 audit and trying to determine how auditors will complete their field work.

D. **Legislative** – Mr. Peterson provided the following legislative updates:

At the Federal level, there is activity addressing financial relief for schools incurring significant unbudgeted expenses due to COVID-19. However, those discussions are stalled in the House with little possibility of a timely resolution. President Trump signed a continuing resolution so that the government will not shut down as the new fiscal year begins without a budget. This resolution will extend government operations until Dec. 11 at which time there will either be another continuing resolution, a vote on the budget to accept it, or the government will shut down.

At the State level, House Bill 2696, which proposes school vouchers, has been withdrawn. These vouchers would have provided funds to families wishing to send students to non-public facilities and programs. This funding would have come at the expense to the public-school community and did not address allegations of financial mismanagement.

In closing, Mr. Peterson reminded everyone to vote on election day, Tuesday, Nov. 3.

E. **Financial Reports** – The following reports were provided in the backup materials:

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

F. **External Cyber Charter Update**

Dr. Vitale discussed the Seneca Valley Academy of Choice (SVAOC) learning option noting that this year, 1,400 students decided to participate in full-time cyber, in SVAOC, at no additional cost to taxpayers. There are also external cyber and brick and mortar charter schools in which some students choose to participate. There has been an increase of student enrollment in these external cyber charter schools which will come at a high cost to the taxpayers. Current external cyber charter enrollment includes 160 regular education students and 32 in special education. Taxpayers will pay tuition for these students. Dr. Vitale stated that she is disappointed that so many students have chosen external programs when we have our own cyber school here at Seneca Valley. Teachers are working to educate parents about our program. Dr. Vitale believes that some families who have chosen an external program will come back to SVAOC and we welcome that as we have a quality program to offer all interested families.

Approximately 50 districts pay Seneca Valley for seats in SVAOC. Legislators have never fixed the current program in which payments are calculated in a manner which requires districts to send more money to charter schools than is needed to operate their programs and places a significant financial burden on district resources and taxpayers. This additional cost has not been budgeted.

Ms. Burtner added the formula for calculating tuition is in legislation and is determined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). Additionally, Ms. Burtner provided the cost per student as follows:

- Regular education students (160) at a cost of \$12,581.78 per child per year.
- Special education students (32) at a cost of \$30,053.77 per child per year.

The estimated tuition bill would total \$2.975 million. Based on previous trends, we budgeted \$1.8 million this school year. The difference is significant and will be challenging to overcome.

Mr. Nickel read a quote from the resolution calling for charter school funding reform which states that in the 2014-15 school year, school districts in the Commonwealth paid charter schools more than \$100 million for special education services in excess of what charter schools reported spending on special education. Mr. Nickel noted that this excess being taken in by cyber charter schools is “pure profit” and urged those on the call and everyone in the community to call State Representative Daryl Metcalfe and Senator Scott Hutchinson and ask why they are not stepping up to fix this broken system.

Mr. DiTullio added that this total equates to 97 mills of tax rate, almost 4%.

Mr. Nickel followed up noting that each district needs to compete to provide a quality product for our students.

3. ACTION AGENDA

- A. **Public Comment** – There was no public comment.
- B. **Personnel** – Personnel items were discussed in an executive session held prior to this meeting:

Resignation: Classified – Pamela Richards

Appointments: Professional Substitutes – Rebecca Lasko, Nathaniel Copeland, Michelle Couch; Classified – Wilbert Schwartz, Stephanie Bush; Supplementals – Dave Reichard, Julie Smith, Jeremiah Friday, Tammy Limmer, Jason Shorr, Dana Hadley, Lisa Tyson, John Fetchko, Ed Senior, Rebecca Beers, Rachel McGourty, Emily Christ, Marie McLachlan, Diane Koegler, Stan Zimmerman, Lara DiFrischia, Tiffany Smietana, Heather Sibeto, Veronica Mortimer, Steve Fortunato, Natalie Green, Laura Kepple Blazejewski, Amanda Shaheen, Aaron Magill, Dean Leventopoulos, Megan Bonistalli, Michael Flood, Amber Hugus, Heather Perella, Kelly Weston, Oliver Wiehe, Linda Plesniak, LaVarr Stephens-Howling, Staci Hughes, Dan McKosky, Janice Plutnicki, Kara Andres

Contracted Services: Artist in Residence – Lauren Shorr

Leaves: Administration – Erin Wilcher; Professional – Michelle Rogozinski, Tara Peterson, Melissa Womer, Judi Spinelli; Classified – Daniel Magill, Lisa Salak

Financial Incentive Program for Professional Substitutes – A bonus over the substitute rate will be awarded to any professional substitute now through January 15, 2021. Substitutes will be awarded a \$300 bonus for every 30 days (non-consecutive) that they work during this time period.

Mr. Nickel motioned, seconded by Ms. Whittle, to approve the resignation, appointments, contracted services, leaves, and financial incentive program for professional substitutes as listed above. Motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative.

- 4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – Approve the following meeting minutes:
 - A. **Work Session** – September 14, 2020
 - B. **Regular Meeting** – September 21, 2020
- 5. **TREASURER’S REPORT** – Approve the treasurer’s reports.
- 6. **GENERAL FUND BILLS** – Approve the general fund bills.
Grand Total: \$4,674,039.85
- 7. **CONSTRUCTION FUND BILLS** – Approve the construction fund bills
Grand Total: \$1,323,628.26

8. **ADMINISTRATION ACTION – Dr. Vitale**

- A. **Charter School Funding Reform Resolution** – Dr. Vitale – Approve the resolution calling for charter school funding reform.

Mr. Nickel read the complete resolution for consideration. Dr. Vitale noted that it will be added to the district's website.

9. **BUSINESS/FINANCE ACTION – Mr. Mike Jacobs**

- A. **Bond Issue** – Approve the appointment of PNC Capital Markets, LLC, as financial advisor and Dinsmore & Shohl, LLP, as bond counsel related to both outstanding and anticipated debt financings in connection with the school district's proposed and developing plans for capital improvements and facilities.

10. **PERSONNEL ACTION – Mr. Jeff Widdowson – (Executive Session)**11. **COMMUNICATION – Communication was received from the following:**A. **Notes of thanks**

1. Mr. Brian Espey
2. Mr. and Mrs. Scott Kramer
3. Ms. Rose Piso
4. Mr. and Mrs. Eric Holby
5. Mr. Michael Baer
6. Mr. and Mrs. Brad Goodman
7. Mr. David Silvester
8. Ms. Freedom Proctor

B. **In support of full-time, in-person instruction beginning October 5, 2020**

1. Ms. Nan Guy
2. Mr. and Mrs. Travis Livingston
3. Ms. Kristin Mihlfried
4. The Mills Family
5. Ms. Meghan Labas
6. Mr. Rudy Marasco
7. Mr. Mark Bidoli
8. Ms. Aubrey Hart
9. Mr. and Mrs. Josh Babir
10. Mr. and Mrs. Ruben Torres
11. Ms. Mary Beth Keally
12. Dr. Tony Anglero

C. **Opposed to full-time, in-person instruction beginning October 5, 2020**

1. Ms. Heather Bianco
2. Ms. Kelly Pyle
3. Ms. Kelly Weber
4. Dr. Megan Foster
5. Ms. Shelly Hess (Pirovano)
6. The Rentz Family
7. Mr. and Mrs. Brad Tresky

8. Ms. Ellen Lippert
9. Ms. Lisa Kumnik
10. Paraprofessionals of Rowan Elementary
11. Ms. Pamela Dixon
12. Mr. John Schmidt
13. Ms. Tammy Snyder
14. Ms. Colleen Tanner
15. Mr. Scott Smith
16. Ms. Shirley Nagle
17. Ms. Diane Smith
18. Ms. Allison Stebbins
19. Ms. Kristie Long
20. Mr. Chuck Roberts
21. Mr. Jason Stevens
22. Ms. Jody Mischik
23. Ms. Nicole Sylves
24. Ms. Marilyn Fleischman
25. Ms. Helen Davis
26. Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Vandermer
27. Ms. Cindy Sekerak
28. Ms. Jeanna Pournaras
29. Ms. Mary Wehner
30. Ms. Judy Wolfe
31. Mr. Bryan Patricca
32. Ms. Gina Zigrossi

- D. **COVID Communication Plan** – Ms. Marilyn Fleischman
- E. **Questions about livestreaming** – Ms. Sarosh Sepai
- F. **Negative effects of mask wearing and social distancing** – Ms. Stephanie Lane
- G. **Clarification of Butler County metrics and social distancing**
1. Mr. Phil Little
 2. Mr. Nicholas Marini
- H. **Attendance at sporting events** – Ms. Meghan Sweeney
- I. **Use of secondary campus pool for Seneca Valley Swim Club** – Ms. Tisha Konvolinka
- J. **Grading** – Ms. Erin McClymonds
- K. **Locker use** – Ms. Erin Donahue
- L. **Cyber Physical Education** – Ms. Faith Solomon

Mr. DiTullio provided a Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) update noting that there is another individual running for the board. At this time, he is unsure of the ballot timeframe and will advise when he finds out more details.

Mr. Nickel stated that our return to school has not been an easy process and provided a personal thanks to all dedicated staff that reported to work today ready to serve.

Dr. Vitale added that today went well in the schools. She stated that we will see COVID cases and we will need to assist the PDE with contact tracing. Nurses, paraprofessionals and teachers are all working hard. In addition, the information technology department, and others, have been working since last week to be sure technology worked for us this evening. Dr. Vitale thanked everyone who got us where we are and stated that when we have cases, we will advise the public. Currently, we are only aware of one student and one support personnel who have tested positive. She added that we will not send letters home if a child in full-time cyber tests positive or if a parent at home tests positive. We continue to ask parents to be patient knowing we may need to shut down a class. Dr. Vitale stated that she is pleased with what she saw today after visiting several buildings. We are utilizing much plexiglass to social distance and protect our students and staff. Even with our diligence, we will have cases and, again, we will keep you updated.

Dr. Vitale thanked teachers who teach in masks all day, which she noted is very challenging. Livestreaming also is not easy. She is proud of our teachers and staff.

Mr. Widdowson thanked teachers and everyone working to make Seneca Valley what it is. He noted the positivity rate for Butler county is at 11.3% and asked what guidance the board will use to decide when it may be time to move back to cohort or full remote given the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and Pennsylvania Department of Health (PDOH) recommendations.

Dr. Vitale referenced the link on the PDE website which provides the current seven-day positivity rate vs. last seven-day positivity rate. These are recommendations, not requirements. Butler county is currently in the “moderate” range.

Dr. Vitale added that we look at other data as well, including daily case rates from Butler county on a 14-day rolling average. We feel this is important data to also consider and is a model that an international epidemiologist from the University of Minnesota uses. We also look at total cases in all Seneca Valley zip codes where you can see the daily change and variance. This is something the board will have to weigh in on moving forward. The 11.3% positivity rate is for all of Butler county, not for the Seneca Valley School District zip codes.

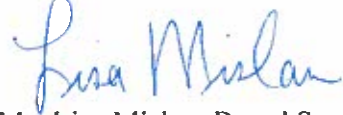
Dr. Vitale urged that in our community, we must do what we can do (social distance, wear masks) to keep the transmission rate low so we can keep schools open.

Mr. Nickel added that there is so much to consider as we make decisions and that we also need to consider the risks associated with students continuing to remain at home, even in cohort model. Taking all data points into consideration, he believes we made the right decision.

Mr. Hester asked that we add an update of data, with opportunity for members to make a motion, if necessary, to the agenda each month moving forward.

12. **ADJOURNMENT** - With nothing further to come before the Board, Mr. DiTullio motioned, seconded by Ms. Harrison, to adjourn the meeting at 8:04 p.m. The motion carried on a voice vote with those present voting in the affirmative.

Mr. James Nickel, Board President



Ms. Lisa Mislán, Board Secretary