

## MINUTES



### Addison Central School District

### ACSD Board

### Board Meeting

Monday, December 16, 2024, 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm

Middlebury Union High School Library 73 Charles Ave, Middlebury

### *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; Courtney Krahn; Ellen Whelan-Wuest; Ellie Romp; James Malcolm; Jamie McCallum; Jason Chance; Joanna Doria; Laura Harthan; Mary Heather Noble; Matthew Corrente; Steve Orzech; Suzanne Buck; Tricia Allen; Wendy Baker

#### A. Call to Order Upon Reaching A Quorum

Barb Wilson 5 min

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

##### 1. Introductions - Board Members, Administrators, and Staff

Navah Glikman, Student Rep to the Board also present.

Note: Several community members in attendance both in person and online.

##### 2. Motion to Adopt Agenda

Barb Wilson suggested amending the agenda to allow 20 minutes for public comment.

Motion to adopt the agenda as amended.

Move: Suzanne Buck Second: Jamie McCallum Status: Passed

#### B. First Public Comment Period

Barb Wilson 10 min

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.

As a reminder, the public comment period is not designed to be a discussion, but rather an opportunity for board members to listen to constituents. Public comments regarding personnel, students or legal matters will not be heard by the Board.

Renee McGinness of Moncton spoke as a representative of VT Family Alliance. She noted that

the age of majority in Vermont is 18, but there has recently been legislation that lowers the age at which children have decision-making authority -- she then cited confidentiality around library use records. She stated that Family is a sacred institution that no government agency can undermine. VT Family Alliance is interested in who should be directing the conversations concerned with the instructional materials in question -- they are present in support of the parents who have concerns with the books. She noted that under current law, the Superintendent and Board likely won't accept the families' request to remove the books, but the laws violate the Constitution. They believe that School Board Policy should require notification to parents about materials like this.

Emily Bissonette of Middlebury thanked the Board for its hard work. She voiced opposition to the attempt to ban books in ACSD and affirmed support for the Mary Hogan teacher and principal. Attempts to ban books overwhelmingly target books by and about LGBTQ+ and racial minority authors. This request is no different. Books like these challenge gender stereotypes. Reaching a book about another genre experience does not change someone's gender identity. She has queer-identifying friends and family who have benefitted from materials like this to help them feel seen and welcomed in a community. Parents have the right to guide their own children's reading materials, but not everyone's children. Children have the right to see themselves and others in literature. She hopes the District will firmly reject the proposal to ban books.

Rory MacDonald of Cornwall is a 7th grader at MUMS. They noted that everyone uses their First Amendment rights daily, like the people who have already commented. But if the First Amendment were really valued, the people trying to ban this book would recognize the right of others to express themselves in books. Banning books takes these rights away by not allowing these stories and opinions to be shared.

Fran Putnam of Weybridge is a retired Early Childhood Educator. She echoed much of what Emily Bissonette already shared, and also wanted to acknowledge that the parents who requested the materials review were likely coming from a place of caring and concern for their children. These parents want agency over what their children learn, and other parents want their children to be included in materials. If books are banned, it will be to the detriment of all children, no matter what their parents desire. She advocated for keeping the instructional materials, but also hopes that the issue can be settled amicably. We need to come together.

Dr. Jodi Brakeley of Middlebury is a retired General Pediatrician and Developmental/Behavioral Pediatrician. She shared an anecdote about a time 25 years ago when she went to a conference in Boston that highlighted a case study about a transgender girl and her family. She shared that in the case study, the transgender girl knew their gender in preschool, and that other children also recognized her as her chosen gender. It's not too early for these materials. The idea of "waiting and seeing" for children to settle on their gender later in puberty is not valid.

Clarissa (no last name given) of Middlebury is a parent of a kindergartner at Mary Hogan and expressed support for the books in question. She provided some statistics about gender identity -- these kids are not hypothetical. They are 2-3 times more likely to report attempting suicide. It is our moral duty as a learning community to protect them against stigma. They should be allowed to not only survive but to flourish. General-affirming support across multiple contexts are protective and benefit all kids. It is important for education to expose kids to gender non-conforming characters -- it fosters inclusion and acceptance. It's not too early for the materials, either. Gender identity begins early.

Ed Wheeler of Middlebury thanked the Board for their time and dedication. He observed how historically education had a large moral component (Judeo-Christian values), which then evolved into a values-free education that focused only on reading/writing/math (to avoid religion and values), and now it has changed again to focus on a "humanist" perspective that does not respect

the Judeo-Christian perspective. For this reason and because of technology, he really fears for the future of public education. How can children be educated when something as basic as how many genders are there, and whether a person can change their biological gender can't be agreed upon? Public education is going to lose the support of the people.

Lindsay Hart of Middlebury is a mother and grandmother and spoke in support of the teachers having these books available to them. The earlier children learn about differences the better. She appreciates the concern the parents have, but believes this is an opportunity for the families to talk to their kids about the issues rather than banning the material.

Lindsey Fuentes-George of Middlebury is a parent and Director of the Teen Center and expressed appreciation for Frannie Gould and the great job she is doing. Everyone deserves respect and deserves to be reflected in their learning materials. She noted that several teen who use the Teen Center identify as LGBTQ+ and that she had observed in the past some alarming rates of self harm among the students. It has been getting better, and she believes community work around acceptance and inclusion helps this. These are real people, real families, parents and kids. She advocated for teaching appreciation for difference instead of fear.

John Watson of Middlebury is a parent of a 30 year-old trans woman. He noted that she exhibited gender nonconforming behaviors very young. It was simply different than the gender stereotype. He reminded everyone that gender and biological sex are not the same thing -- and that he recognizes that not everyone understands this. But banning literature that expresses this truth does everyone a disservice.

Molly Saunders of Middlebury spoke in support of kids having access to books with a diverse range of characters. She just finished a semester toward her Master's degree in social work. The LGBTQ+ community is protected by anti discrimination law, and wonders if the Title 9 anti discrimination rules might have some bearing here. She also echoed Rory MacDonald's point about the First Amendment.

- C. Recommendation to Approve Minutes of December 9, 2024 Barb Wilson 5 min

Motion to approve the minutes of December 9, 2024.

Move: James Malcolm Second: Steve Orzech Status: Passed

- D. Approve ACSD Bills James Malcolm 5 min

No ACSD bills.

- E. Report of Student Representatives Navah Glikman 5 min  
Sophia Lawton

Navah Glikman reported that Student Council on Human Rights (SCOHR) recently finished its canned food drive. They successfully collaborated with MUMS and Mary Hogan to broaden the impact. SCOHR students were also involved in the Polar Express in Burlington, where they dressed up as elves and handed candy out to children. Everyone is looking forward to the holiday break as stress levels have been high with end-of-semester exams.

- F. Report of Superintendent Wendy Baker 60 min

1. School Choice Letter - MUHS

Jason Chance asked whether the number of opening per grade could be evened out. Tricia Allen asked who is taking the slots -- do they typically go to freshman students? Dr. Baker

explained how Choice works out-of-district students. Steve Orzech explained that because MUHS is a sending school for PAHCC, some out-of-district students take the Choice spots as upperclassmen to take advantage of the PAHCC program options.

Motion to approve allowing 15 out-of-district students to attend MUHS under the Choice provision, which will likely open up 7 opening for the 2025-26 school year.

Move: Steve Orzech Second: Suzanne Buck Status: Passed

2. Action: Personnel Appointments and Resignations

Note: Laura Harthan abstained from voting.

Motion to accept the following ACSD resignations and appointments:

- a. Resignation of Samuel Stannard, Grounds Technician, 1.0 FTE, Effective 11/29/24;
- b. Appoint Derek Coombs, Wrestling Coach, Effective 12/16/24.

Move: Suzanne Buck Second: Jamie McCallum Status: Passed

- a. Accept Resignation of Samuel Stannard, Grounds Technician, 1.0 FTE, Effective 11/29/24
- b. Appoint Derek Coombs, Wrestling Coach, Effective 12/16/24

3. Budget Presentation #4 - Draft FY26 Budget

Matthew Corrente

Dr. Baker and Matt Corrente both guided the Board through FY26 Budget Presentation #4 -- slides available

at <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1734383307/acsdvtorg/ofdlvyrj3prmp2ju2n2o/FY26BudgetDevelopment-4-1-.pdf>

They reviewed the Block format again, and noted that almost all budget items have been classified into one of seven blocks. They made the analogy of taking all the furniture out of the house and then putting what is needed back where it should belong or is needed most. This presentation provides all the tax calculation details (including the state's Yield figures and new CLA adjustments), and also focuses on Block 3 -- which includes Direct Instruction Core Personnel, as required by VT's Education Quality Standards, based on enrollment. Dr. Baker explained that Principals were asked to focus on student performance, were asked what they needed to support/improve, and then worked to develop a building plan around it. She noted that there will be more focus on universal instruction by trained and certified professionals rather than the recovery/intervention with paraprofessionals.

Joanna Doria asked about the tools used for student outcomes in this budget building process. Dr. Baker responded that Principals were invited to use any/all data they felt explained their students. They will be part of the presentation on January 6th.

Highlights from Tax Portion of the presentation:

- Homestead Property Yield for FY26 set at \$8553 (but includes CLA adjustment, so shouldn't be directly compared with that for FY25, which was \$9893). Income Yield for FY26 is \$12,260 and Nonhomestead Property Rate is \$1.791
- The Updated Excess Spending Threshold for FY26 is 118% of state average per LTWADM spending, set at \$15,926. Note: ACSD's FY25 per pupil spending was \$16,009

- Slides 8&9 explain the state's CLA adjustment factor
- Slides 10-12 illustrate the base tax rate calculations and the decreased discount for FY26 as part of the state's on-ramp for Act 183 student weighting impacts.
- Slides 16-17 illustrate how Long Term Weighted Average Daily Membership is calculated for ACSD based on enrollment and demographics. The expected LTWADM for the District is 2760.18 – higher because of higher weighting of our older students (which have increased).
- Slides 19-20 illustrate the preliminary District Tax Rate, Education spending (\$40,842,342), and the FY26 projected per pupil spending (\$14,797 or -8.0%).
- Remaining slides illustrate property tax calculations based on EDTR and CLA, as well as the "bridge" needed for comparing FY25 figures against FY26 figures.

There was some discussion about when the Board can expect CLA figures for each town, and how the state's CLA adjustment factor works. Mary Heather Noble asked Matt's opinion on how best to educate voters on the budget. He suggested a multi-faceted approach that breaks the information down into digestible bites. He also suggested identifying budget champions in the community, and training them on how to share the budget information. He noted that Principals talk to families the most and would be good budget ambassadors.

Ellen Whelan-Wuest commented on the unlikelihood that voters will want mathematical details. They want to know what the District is investing in and what the bill will look like. Barb Wilson mentioned the importance of including some town-specific information because many towns like to incorporate those pages into their Town Report.

Highlights from Block 3 portion of budget presentation:

Dr. Baker first explained that the Director of Teaching & Learning salary and benefits have been moved from Block 1 Administrative expenses to Block 3 Director Instruction expenses. Because of this the Block 1 budget is changing by -7.0% in FY26.

- Slide 30 summarizes important elements of the Block 3 budget, including the addition of Student Response Coordinators to MUMS and MUHS (these are repurposed funds from the Student Services block and is being done to make sure that how the District is handling student conduct, etc. is in alignment with Strategic Plan goals); Health FTEs at all schools to implement health & wellness policy; elementary class sizes that meeting D6 (15.5 avg). Note: number of teachers needed in Ripton pending D6 policy work.

- Slides 32 & 33 illustrate projected enrollment, classrooms and class sizes

- The budget for Professional Development and Curriculum in Block 3 is \$1,002,626 or up by 29% (again due to movement of Director of Teaching & Learning position from Block 1). This reflected the state mandated coordinated curriculum requirements. The IB fees \$40,000 have been moved to Block 6 student opportunities because participating in IB is a choice rather than the state mandate, so Dr. Baker feels this is a more accurate & transparent representation of those expenses.

There were some Board member questions about where staffing reductions will be occurring, and how the student response coordinator position is working at Mary Hogan. Dr. Baker provided some details and noted that the January 6th budget presentation will have more

granular information about specific spending plans at each school.

4. State Level Budget Drivers Update

Matthew Corrente

To be addressed at January 6, 2024 meeting.

G. Report of the Chair

Barb Wilson 5 min

Barb Wilson reported that she will not be present at the January 6th Board meeting, so Suzanne Buck will be running the meeting.

H. Report of the Board

20 min

1. Communications & Engagement Committee Update

Tricia Allen

Tricia Allen reported that the C&E Committee will be meeting on Dec 17th to discuss communications and engagement around the FY26 budget.

2. Facilities Committee Update

Jason Chance

Jason Chance reported that the Facilities Committee will be meeting on December 18th.

3. Finance Committee Update

James Malcolm

James Malcolm noted that the Board has already been updated on the Finance Committee's work.

4. Negotiations Committee Update

Steve Orzech

No news -- Committee is currently dormant.

5. Policy Committee Update

Jamie McCallum

Jamie McCallum provided a summary of the Policy Committee's work since the last Board meeting's discussion about proposed changes to Policy D6.

a. First Read: D6 - Class Size

Jamie McCallum shared the latest version of Policy D6 and noted that it had been reviewed by legal counsel. The modifications include clarifying how the policy affects siblings and whether they can move along with volunteer or otherwise moved students, transportation, and the duration that moved students will stay at their new school. This is the first read of the current version, so there will not be a Board vote on this tonight.

Suzanne Buck asked what the statement about transportation being available only through "existing bus routes" meant, noting that this would not allow some potential volunteer students to get to Ripton in time for the beginning of school.

Brian Bauer suggested that the Betcha Transit rep would need to work with District Office over the summer to figure that would.

Ellen Whelan-Wuest explained that the language was an attempt to provide transportation to volunteer families within the existing structure, and be transparent that there is no guarantee.

Jason Chance asked about the Optimal Class Size -- last week it as set at 15, but now is

set at 17. Dr. Baker acknowledged that she had set it at 17 since that is the average class size across the district. Jason also expressed concern about the equity aspects of the proposed Policy language, noting that the Board spent a long time hashing out a strategic plan that was based in large part from community feedback that asked the District to factor equity into every decision the Board makes. He asked: does this version of D6 increase equity or decrease equity? Families who can participate in the opportunity to move to a school with a class opening are limited by transportation, after school care needs, potentially language barriers and ability to navigate the admin process, etc. He acknowledged the "temporary" nature of the fix, but also pointed out the potential longer-term impacts.

Ellen Whelan-Wuest acknowledged the comments, but also wondered what an equity filter or test would look like. It is an important thing to think about and also cautioned against the use of "equity" as a means to halt consideration of potential solutions. The Board will need some expert perspective on the equity check. She noted for her, providing some parental agency (in a way that the District currently does not) seems relevant to equity, but acknowledged that it may feel more stacked for some families than others.

Ellie Romp expressed concern with the revision of the Optimal Class size from 15 to 17 students. This is the average across the district (which includes MUMS and MUHS), but is worried that it would be used to justify larger class sizes for elementary school classes and that it is only 2 students away from the recommended class size maximum for 1st-5th grade.

Mary Heather Noble thanked the Policy Committee for its continued work and echoed Jason's equity concerns. She expressed specific discomfort with codifying a process with known equity issues into policy, which doesn't align with the Board's Strategic Plan. She noted that since it is intended as a temporary solution to a specific and timely problem -- perhaps the Board should just take an individual action on Ripton's specific request, and simplify the language in D6 to equip the Superintendent with the tools needed to remedy noncompliance with D6. She suggested having the policy state that the Superintendent may present for board approval a plan and equitable process to invite students into open spots of under-filled classrooms, or if necessary may move a cohort of students to another school... This would allow but not require the superintendent to invite students to fill a classroom depending on the specific circumstances, and would allow the Board to review the proposal to ensure that equity issues are addressed as best as they can be.

Suzanne Buck recalled that equity and transportation issues were big main reasons that school choice wasn't initially provided upon creation of ACSD. She acknowledged the need for a tool for next year so that small class sizes can be remedied, but she struggles with putting something into policy that favors the 'have' over the 'have nots'. She acknowledged the Committee's hard work and the great start at solving the problem. The District needs to do what is right for all students.

Steve Orzech expressed appreciation for the kudos given to the Policy Committee. The proposed policy D6 represents a compromise. They worked for a long time on this and nobody is 100% happy with it, but it is a compromise that equips the superintendent with the tools requested to remedy noncompliance with the D6 class size requirements. Do we want to derail this effort to solve the problem? Are we prepared to do nothing about it? He reminded the Board that policies can be changed if needed. They are not set in stone.

Laura Harthan made an effort to make sure everyone is on the same page: This effort was in response to a specific problem. It does not open up school choice for the whole district. It does not change the C30 hardship request. She shared that she also brought up the equity concerns during the Policy Committee meetings, and noted that the District would absolutely try to provide transportation if possible. This is a compromise that resulted in an imperfect policy to provide the administration with the tools needed to move forward on addressing class sizes that are too small.

Jamie McCallum thanked the Board for the feedback. He echoed the Policy Committee members about their characterization of the process. He challenged Board members to consider whether the limitations around accessibility to the opportunity are inequitable or just reasonable (e.g., making sure allowing a student to move to Ripton wouldn't create a D6 issue in their current classroom). He walked through some examples and wondered whether transportation might be able to be provided. These few volunteers would be providing a service to the District and might be worthy of an exception. Brian Bauer noted that this question would likely be answered by Matt Corrente and Betcha Transit.

There was continued discussion about School Choice in general, and keeping the conversation at hand in perspective. James Malcolm noted that whatever solution is selected will not resolve all possible equity concerns; Tricia Allen expressed concern about doing nothing. There were some suggested edits to language. Mary Heather Noble again made a case for changing the minimum class size for K-5 from 10 to 12 students. Ellie Romp responded with concern. Jamie McCallum expressed that this request seemed too big, and would require research/expert input on the merits. He does not feel that the minimum number for data reporting was a good reason to change the number. He asked about the process forward from there. Dr. Baker and Suzanne Buck clarified the required process/timeline for warning and approving policy changes. The Committee will either need to bring back the same version for a vote -- and the Board may amend it. Or the Committee can incorporate some more changes and bring it back for another first read.

6. Addison Central SEPAC Update

Joanna Doria  
Suzanne Buck

Joanna Doria reported that SEPAC has not had a meeting since the last update -- but is scheduled to meet Thursday December 19th.

7. VSBA Regional Update

Suzanne Buck

Suzanne Buck reported that VSBA discussed the Preliminary Report from the Commission on the Future of Public Education in Vermont. There is concern that the legislature will view the recommendations as action items; they expect that the legislature will be looking specifically at class size, buildings, and budgets. She also reported that the VSBA is currently reviewing and revising Attendance and Discipline policies.

8. Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center Update

Steve Orzech  
Tricia Allen

Steve Orzech reported that the PAHCC Board will be meeting on Thursday Dec 19th.

9. Middlebury Community TV Update

Barb Wilson

Barb Wilson reported that Kurt Broderson recorded the MUHS 10th grade project exhibition and the 3-school opera collaboration (James Malcolm took a moment to praise the 3 Addison County school districts and their work on the opera production). She also noted that Kurt is hoping to get on the Finance Committee's agenda and asked someone from the committee to contact him.



10. Parks and Recreation Update

Mary Heather Noble

No updates to report.

I. Second Public Comments Period

Barb Wilson 10 min

(see description for First Public Comment Period)

J. Board Reflections

Barb Wilson 5 min

Mary Heather Noble again thanked the Policy Committee for its work and acknowledged how frustrating the process has likely been for its members.

K. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Motion to adjourn.

Move: James Malcolm Second: Jamie McCallum Status: Passed

Total Meeting Time: 2h 10m

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